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**The Pedagogical Value of Polling:  
A Coordinated 2012 Exit Poll Project Across Diverse Classrooms**

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Several previous studies have demonstrated that student exit polling has educational value and promotes civic engagement (Berry and Robinson 2012, Evans and Lagergren 2007, Lelieveldt and Rossen 2009, and others). The authors of this paper have created assignments and an instructor's manual on running student exit polls in undergraduate courses. Three institutions used these assignments during the fall 2012 semester. Working together, these instructors created an opportunity for their students to participate collaboratively with others in survey design and data analysis. This effort further provided assessment data on the effectiveness of this pedagogical approach for student engagement outside of the classroom in different communities and course contexts. Student surveys measured the impact that this experience had on their understanding of their own community, their relationship to the national community, their understanding of survey methodology, and descriptive statistics. Do students learn more about their community or the scientific process? Does it matter whether the course is designed primarily around politics, statistics, or public opinion? This paper addresses these questions and how these effects vary across different types of students and classrooms.

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## **Introduction**

One of the most challenging aspects of teaching is engaging students in such a way that they will not only learn the course material but will also develop a deeper understanding of the study of political science and how it applies to the “real world.” As instructors, we want to design assignments that help students understand the relevance and importance of the subject matter to their everyday lives. As Cronin (1991) pointed out “Good teachers take into account the old truism: ‘I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand’” (487). At the end of the day, it is clear from many studies (Young 1996; Occhipinti 2003; Prince 2004; Weiler 2004; Oros 2007; Sloam 2010; Csajko and Lindaman 2011), that “students like and learn more from doing things than just sitting and learning” (Cronin 1991, 487). Many political science courses lend themselves to engaging students in hands-on and practical opportunities that will enhance important job-related skills including gathering research, analyzing data, working in a collaborative manner, and developing their verbal and communication skills. Whether this is done through simulations, role playing, or other forms, active learning has been continuously promoted by educators (Endersby and Webber 1995; Ciliotta-Rubery and Levy 2000; Larson 2004; Frederking 2005; Oros 2007; Hoffman 2009; Archer and Miller 2011; Bardwell 2011; Pautz 2011). Active learning techniques are effective because they “encourage students to do more than simply read about concepts” (Pautz 2011, 648) and are successful for both motivating students to seek out additional information and for increasing student interest in the subject matter.

With these ideas in mind and the presidential election that provided a rich opportunity for experiential learning, we created assignments and an instructor’s manual for running an exit polling project in undergraduate courses. Multiple learning goals informed the careful design of each assignment. First and foremost, we wanted the assignments to be participatory and practical. Therefore we incorporated the use of the web, videos, and graphs culminating with a “hands-on” out-of-the-classroom exit poll. The assignments combined concepts and theories in political science with the “study” of the discipline by incorporating research methodology, specifically survey research. Our hope was to develop practical and interesting assignments that encouraged students to become more engaged with the political process by applying what they study in a meaningful way. As political scientists we are not only teaching our students about the theories and methods of the discipline, but also about how to be effective citizens. The exit polling project also allowed us to explore how students relate to their community and what they understand about their national community in a presidential election year. Finally, through our collaboration we were able to assess the impact of regional culture, course type, and temporal context to see if any of these factors matter in student learning.

## **Literature Review**

Several previous studies have demonstrated that student exit polling projects have educational value and, in addition, promote civic engagement (Cole 2003; Evans and Lagergren 2007; Lelieveldt and Rossen 2009; and Berry and Robinson 2012). Specifically, Lelieveldt and Rossen (2009) found that “exit polls are a perfect way to implement a problem-based type of learning within the political science curriculum and connect theory to practice, as well as bringing together academia and the local community” (113). Csajko and Lindaman (2011) focused on whether or not engaging students in the election process by having them participate as poll workers and election monitors/judges allows for students to have higher levels of political efficacy and engagement. Sloam (2010) argues that there is often a “disconnect” between

political science faculty and their students and that “political science education becomes meaningless (or at least greatly weakened) if detached from real-world politics” (330-331). Therefore, it is important to provide students with opportunities for both learning about political theories and concepts as well as opportunities for experiential learning activities because this will lead to students who are “more likely to participate in the classroom, society, and politics” (Sloam 2010, 331).

Designing assignments that are “active” is important, and Weiler (2004) shows “that only a very small percentage of the general population prefers to learn by reading” (49). While we cannot (or might not want to) escape from reading in our courses, we can design assignments with these findings in mind. Hands-on opportunities that take place outside of the classroom are particularly valuable for teaching many subjects within political science, and this is especially true for teaching research methods to undergraduate students. Over thirty years ago, McGaw and Watson described three specific problems that teachers face in teaching research methods. First, is the monumental problem of negligible student interest in empirical inquiry. “They [are] more concerned with the “important” substantive social and political problems of the day” (1976, vii). Secondly, texts on research methods are not particularly effective in meeting the student needs. While some books may effectively present isolated course topics, according to McGraw and Watson, no resources have “effectively integrated the various phases of empirical inquiry into a comprehensive overview that an introductory student could understand and appreciate” (ibid). Third, these research methods texts ignore even basic principles of education (ibid). While these observations are old, they are not outdated. These issues continue to make it particularly difficult for teachers to successfully teach research methods courses.

For example, “To be more interesting to students, teachers of research methods courses should actively engage students in participative exercises” (Hubbell 1994, 60). One way to actively engage students is to mirror the research process in the classroom (ibid). As Winn suggests, “[Students]... need to gain an understanding of how the various stages of research fit together in the research process” (1995, 204). Using participatory exercises allows students to become directly involved in their research, either as the administrator or the actual respondents. In this way it demonstrates to students that research is done in a rich context and is so much more than the set of methodological tools taught in the research methods classroom (ibid). Regardless of the pedagogical approach, our courses should focus on making students “intelligent consumers of research” (Hubbell 1994, 60). For this reason, a strong emphasis is placed on research methods in almost every scientific field. One of the most common research method applications across the social sciences is survey research.

### **Teaching Survey Research**

Regardless of its weaknesses, survey research is a useful tool both outside and *inside* the classroom. As Cole suggests, “From the pedagogical experiential learning literature, advocates suggest that students would not only learn the course material better, but derive benefits extending past learning the course material” (2003, 245). Young further explains, “Adding a brief field project to political science classes injects excitement and stimulates an interest in course material” (1996, 11). Driven by this excitement over hands-on application, students “make the connection between theoretical knowledge and the real world” (Cole 2003, 245-246).

Survey research is a common method utilized by the social sciences and has pedagogical advantages. Quantitative data is quickly generated so students can begin analyzing the data before the end of the class or semester. It is also useful in illustrating the logic of causation and

association (Ransford and Butler 1982). The comprehensiveness of the survey research method permits students to design, test, and analyze their findings in a relatively short amount of time. Many other methods of research are not as easily created or administered (Ransford and Butler 1982).

### **Data Section**

Many political science courses lend themselves to engaging students in experiential learning. The exit-polling project we developed can be used in a variety of different courses including, but not limited to, an introductory American government course, a campaigns and elections course, a research methods course, or a public opinion and polling course. The assignments could be used throughout the semester as either the main focus of a course or simply as a supplemental element of the course.

Building on the important findings from scholars who have conducted exit polls and other types of experiential learning assignments, we integrated the exit polling project in our courses throughout the semester and provided an “outside” of the classroom hands-on and practical opportunity to apply course content about elections, polling, survey methodology, and descriptive statistics. We took this opportunity also to learn how this experience affected students’ understanding of their community as well as their relationship to the national community. Berry and Robinson (2012) discuss how time-consuming conducting an exit poll could be so we decided to prepare a manageable exit-polling project for general with minimal outside preparation. This instructor’s resource included a survey template for immediate use or customization. While students did not design the survey instrument, we encouraged class discussions about the rationale for the types of questions that were included. Questions in the template survey substantively covered theories and concepts from the broader political science literature. For example, we wanted students to think about unified/divided government and voter preference. A question asked respondents: “If President Obama is re-elected whom would you rather have the U.S. Congress controlled by?” With the literature divided on whether or not presidential debates make a difference in voter decisions, we included a question about the role of debates in respondent presidential vote choice. We also wanted to emulate the national exit polls and asked many of the same questions they include (See Appendix A).

It is also important to keep in mind that we are teaching a new generation of students with different learning styles and expectations. Today’s students prefer to work collaboratively, to use technology or multimedia, to be “actively doing things” (Oblinger 2006, 10). McGlynn (2008) argues that “we need to provide students with Internet video clips and websites, particularly interactive Websites that will help them learn the course material” (22). Our assignment accomplished all of these goals. The entire exit-polling assignment is web-based allowing students to use their preferable mode for learning given that they have grown up as “digital natives.” In writing about the learning styles of the millennial generation, Oblinger (2006) found that “in a study that altered instructions from a text-based step-by-step approach to one that used a graphic layout, refusals to do the assignment dropped and post-test scores increased” (10). The web-based design of assignments is intended to reinforce these learning preferences. In addition, an instructor’s resource manual provides step-by-step instructions for completing the exit poll project (See Appendix A).

## **Bloom's Taxonomy**

Creating assignments that reflect both student learning preferences as well as learning theories is essential for developing effective assignments. We designed six modules for the Exit Polling project with Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy for the Cognitive Domain (1956), a commonly accepted learning theory, in mind. While some have argued that the model Bloom developed is too hierarchical and that learning does not always take place according to the six categories in the order outlined (Wineberg and Schneider 2009-2010), we find tremendous value in Bloom's model and believe that the assignments associated with this learning module provide students with the necessary tools to develop a comprehensive *understanding* of the role and purpose of exit polls in elections as well as how to *conduct* survey research and *analyze* and *interpret* data.

Our assignments provide students with multiple opportunities to master the six categories outlined by Bloom thus maximizing the potential for learning. Bloom's Taxonomy is often represented as a "pyramid." Similarly, these modules also build on each other beginning with the most basic information in the first module "What is an Exit Poll?" and culminating with an assignment that requires students to critique and evaluate their experience in "Reflection: Your Turn: What do you think about Exit Polling?" The six modules for the assignment are: What is an Exit Poll?, Exit Poll Controversies, Accurate Exit Polls (sampling), Exit Poll in a Box, Analyze the Results, and Reflection: Your Turn: What do you think about Exit Polling? We designed the project to introduce students to various components of an Exit Poll including the history of exit polls, recent controversies with exit polls, and the accuracy of exit polls (sampling and question design) of exit polls through short, tailored assignments that take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. Each module incorporates news articles, video clips, links to web resources that provide graphs and data to be used for application and analysis, as well as brief paragraphs of information written specifically for the project. Students answer a series of corresponding questions for each module. The questions are either short answer or multiple choice (or a combination of both types of questions) depending upon the instructor's preference.

Bloom's Taxonomy consists of six main categories; knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Over the years, the names of the categories have been revised to reflect a more "active" learning process.<sup>1</sup> Even though the names of the categories have changed, the concepts remain the same. Consequently, for purposes of this paper, we rely on Bloom's original category descriptors.

The first level of Bloom's "pyramid" is "*knowledge*" and is defined by the ability to "recall data or information" (Bloom 1956). To provide an opportunity for students to develop the necessary background and information about exit polls, we assigned news articles and embedded questions that asked students a number of questions. These ranged from the most basic *knowledge* level (asking them to simply "recall" the information they read) to more advanced questions requiring evaluation (asking them to make judgments about the material).

For example, one question from the first assignment was "According to Michael McDonald, what is the primary purpose of an exit poll?" This question provided an opportunity for students to define and identify the most basic information about an exit poll. To test their *comprehension* of the material, we asked students "In what ways do media or political pundits use exit polling results?" For students to truly master new concepts, they must be able to *apply* the material learned to new situations. Therefore, we asked students to practice "sampling" by

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<sup>1</sup> The new categories are: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and

taking what they had learned from the posted readings to determine the best “sample” of polling precincts in their area. With a link to the Country Registrar of Voters along with a sample size calculator, students determined how many voters should be included in a sample of their county if a 3% margin of error and a 95% confidence interval was desired. We then asked students to determine the recommended sample if the margin of error was changed to 5% to provide another chance for students to “compute, manipulate, modify, and demonstrate” which are all aspects of *application*. *Analysis* involves comparing and contrasting and “distinguishing between facts and inferences” (Bloom 1956). This is followed by *Synthesis* which requires that students be able to “put parts together to form a whole, with emphasis on creating new meaning or structure” (Bloom 1956). Examples of questions that are designed to have students *analyze* and *synthesize* the information include: “Compare and contrast closed questions and open questions” (Analysis) which is followed by two questions that ask students to “create new meaning.” These questions are: “What is polling bias?” and “In writing questions about voter attitudes, how can the questions be balanced?” The final question in the first assignment provided an opportunity for students to complete the last category in Bloom’s Taxonomy *evaluation*. Students were asked the following question in order to demonstrate their ability to “make judgments about the value of ideas or material” (Bloom 1956): “Based on what you've learned about exit polls, how might political campaigns make better use of polling data?”

As students completed each module they had opportunities to answer questions that focused on *knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation*.<sup>2</sup> Not only did each module allow for all of Bloom’s categories to be addressed, but as the modules progressed they also required students to apply previously learned information so that they developed a comprehensive understanding of the role of exit polls in elections, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The opportunity for reflection in the final module was also intentionally included because some have found a need for this generation of students to “be encouraged to stop experiencing and spend time reflecting” (Oblinger 2006, 10).

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<sup>2</sup> See Table 1 for sample questions for each category in Bloom’s Taxonomy.

Table 1: Sample Questions for Bloom's Taxonomy

Category	Question
Knowledge	What is sampling and how is it used to conduct exit polls?
	Using the graphs, compare the support for Democrats and Republicans by age group, focusing especially on those under 30 and over 60.
Application and Analysis	An interviewer is tasked with using her best judgment to collect exit surveys from 30 women and 25 men. What kind of sampling method is that?
	From the Marin County Elections Department, find the list of polling sites for the November general election. Excluding mail ballot precincts, how many polling places are there and what is the total number of registered voters? (Hint: Totals are at the bottom of the list.)
	Using <a href="#">this map</a> from the American Presidency Project, what were the final electoral vote counts for each candidate? How do those compare to the popular vote counts?
Analysis (and real world application)	According to the student exit polling data, what were the three most important issues? How does that compare to the national results?
Synthesis	Looking over the data presented in the bar graphs, what are three things you notice about those who voted Democrat or Republican in the 2010 midterm election?
	Compare and contrast the problems involving exit poll data in the 2000 presidential election with the problems seen in the 2012 recall election. List at least two similarities and two differences.
Evaluation	Based on what you've learned about exit polls, how might political campaigns make use of polling data?
	What do you think can be done to prevent a bias in polling responses as seen in the 2000 and 2012 elections? In other words, how might pollsters collect a sample of responses that matches the actual electorate?

Berry and Robinson (2012) suggested contacting local media outlets to inquire about interest in covering the students and the project. We followed their lead and arranged coverage by both print and television news stories. The design of the exit-polling project lends itself to sharing information easily, since some of the training and student assessments are online. If a journalist wants to run an in-depth feature on the student training, he or she can view the websites and videos used for homework.

Other important features of the training are part of the face-to-face class. For example, we had the students practice approaching voters with the poll in class, with other students posing as voters. These practice sessions were fun, funny, and very lively. They can easily be captured on video. Instructors can either borrow a video camera from the campus to use, or can ask the campus marketing department if they would like to film. The public relations and marketing departments on campus can be helpful in producing media attention as well as permanent educational pieces for the students. At UWF, the University decided to film a piece profiling the



project and the student experience. This took the burden off the instructor and resulted in a short video that can be used in future classes to introduce the exit polling project.

### **Institutions Participating in Exit Poll 2012**

Evans first utilized the exit poll project at the University of West Florida in 2004. In 2012, she partnered with Mary Jane Lindrum of Soomo Publishing. The expanded program involved classrooms at three institutions: Dominican University of California, and Merrimack College in Massachusetts, and the University of West Florida. On Election Day, 64 students acted as pollsters for UWF, 16 for Dominican, and 17 for Merrimack. An additional 17 students worked behind the scenes at UWF to prepare the materials and monitor progress throughout Election Day. All UWF students earned their Certification in Human Subjects Research from the National Institutes of Health as part of their preparation.

### **Survey Methodology**

The sample for the exit poll is selected in two stages. In the first stage, the UWF class randomly selected 20 precincts out of 79 in the county for the poll. The final sample included 14 of the 20 precincts. Dominican and Merrimack selected several precincts close to campus. At all three schools, students were allowed to choose which of the sampled precincts to visit for polling. Students polled from 7AM to 7PM on Election Day, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

In the second stage of sampling, students selected voters at the polling place. To ensure random selection of voters at the precinct, students asked every third voter if he or she would like to participate in the poll. This practice reinforced the learning objective of random sampling in survey design that every voter has an equal probability of being selected for the poll. Students asked each voter to fill out a survey designed by Jenna Emery at UWF and by Alison Howard at Dominican. Students wrote questions for the survey as well. After a round of voting, the students chose their top three questions, and these student-written questions were added to the survey. These varied at each school and are not shown in appendix.

Students wore identification so voters would recognize the project as legitimate and affiliate the students with area universities. The instructors led students through training and facilitated a practice session in class on approaching voters. They also practiced responding to a variety of scenarios, answering questions about the nature of the project and deflecting questions that might produce biased results. For example, instructors warned students not to share any personal opinions while polling, to avoid influencing voter responses.

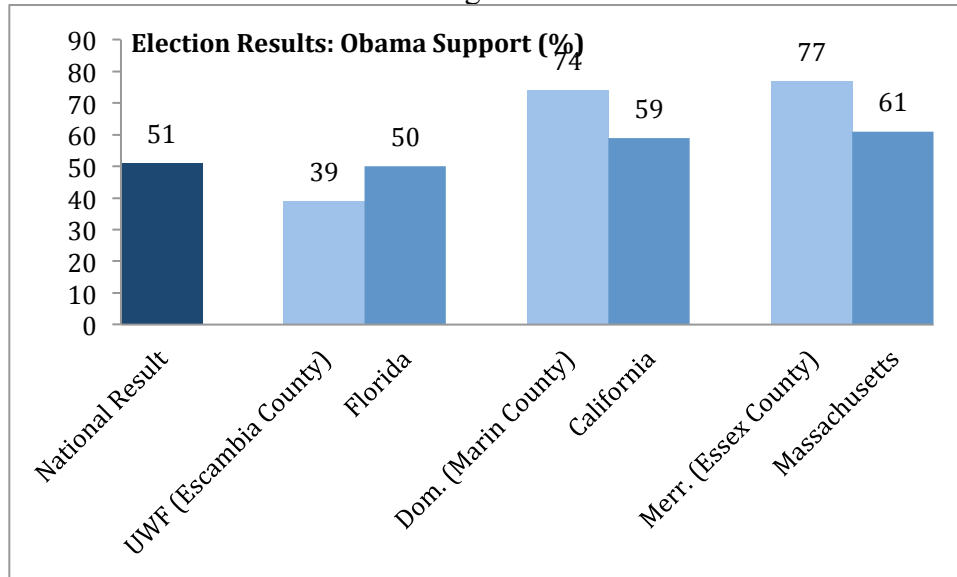
### **2012 Exit Poll Results**

A review of the results of the exit poll conducted by these three institutions sheds light on the student experience and frames the discussion of student assessment of learning outcomes. The next few pages discuss the survey responses on the role of partisanship, issue saliency, and demographic indicators such as race and/or ethnicity. We also provide cross-institutional analysis to illustrate how the data permitted students to compare and contrast their own communities with those of other college students across the country.

The 2012 exit poll includes 1814 respondents: 891 at the University of West Florida, 479 at Merrimack College, and 444 at Dominican University. The sample is evenly split between men and women (681 and 673, respectively). Students polled 351 voters between 18-29, 978 between 30 and 59, and 486 voters at 60 or more years of age. The sample is overwhelmingly white at 79%. Students compared the county-level data to the states. UWF is less Democratic

than the Florida average (Escambia County Supervisor of Elections 2012), while both Dominican and Merrimack are more Democratic than their respective states, California and Massachusetts (California Secretary of State, Essex County Clerk 2012).

Figure 1



Our exit poll data represents Escambia County and Marin County closely. Merrimack’s results, however, are more Republican-leaning than the county’s reported election result. The accuracy of results in each county depends largely on the sample size collected. At UWF, with 891 respondents, there is a 3.3% margin of error in predicting the county outcomes. At Dominican and Merrimack, with 444 and 479 respondents each, the margin of error is larger.

So that students could see how their county related to a broader region, we compared our results for whites to data from the National Election Pool (Blow 2012). This data is compared to the county data for the three participating schools. Figures 2 and 3 showed the students that white voters are not behaving uniformly across states or counties.

Figure 2

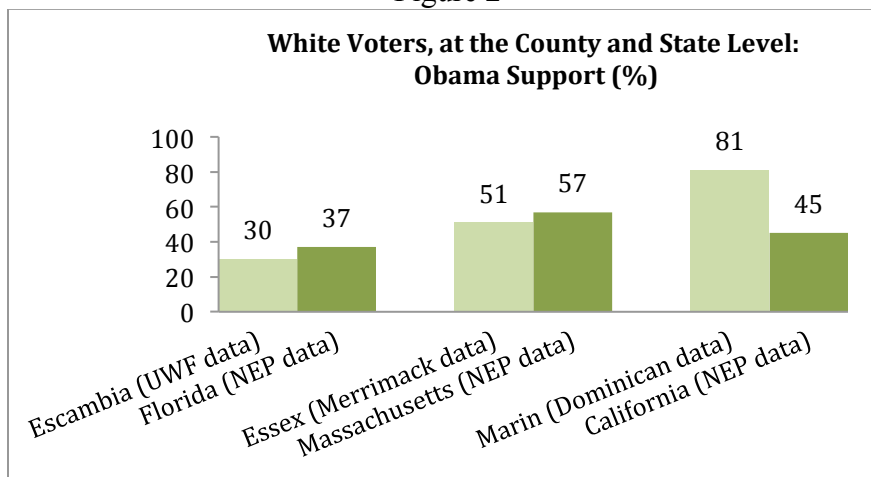
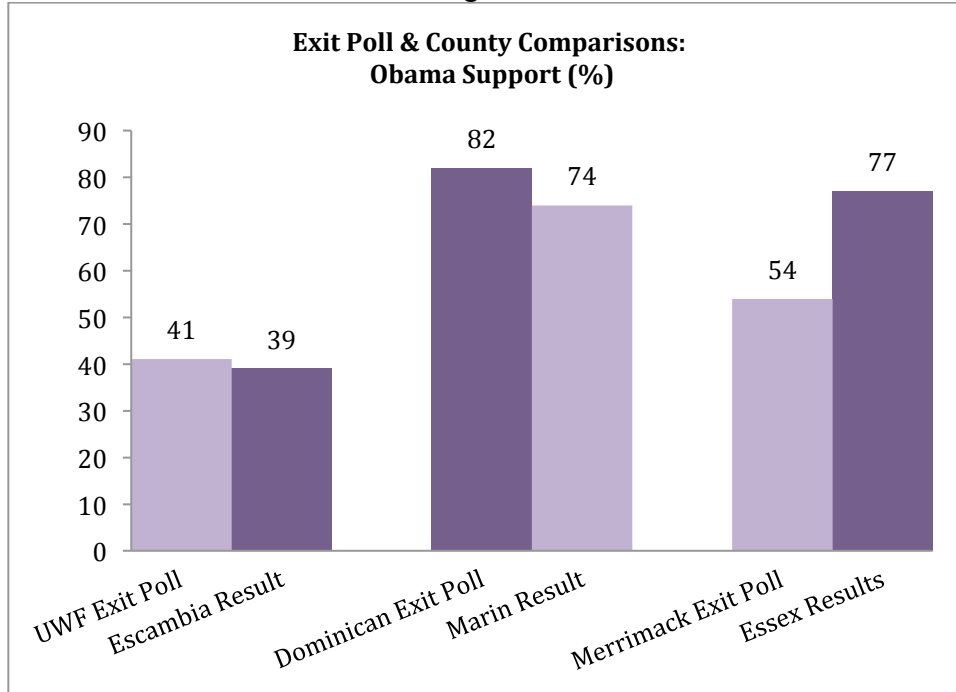
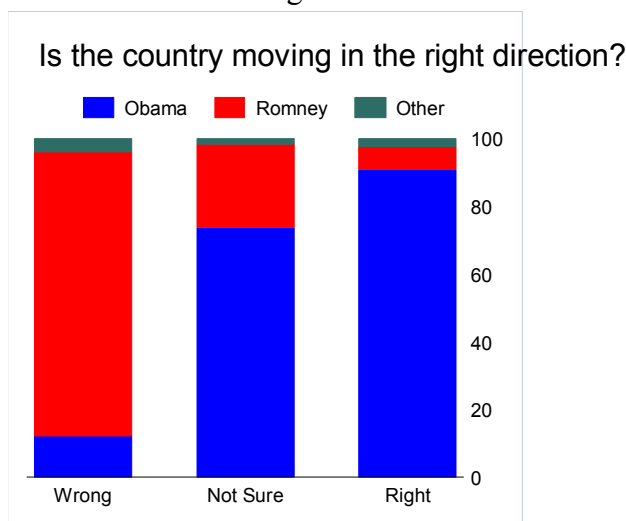


Figure 3



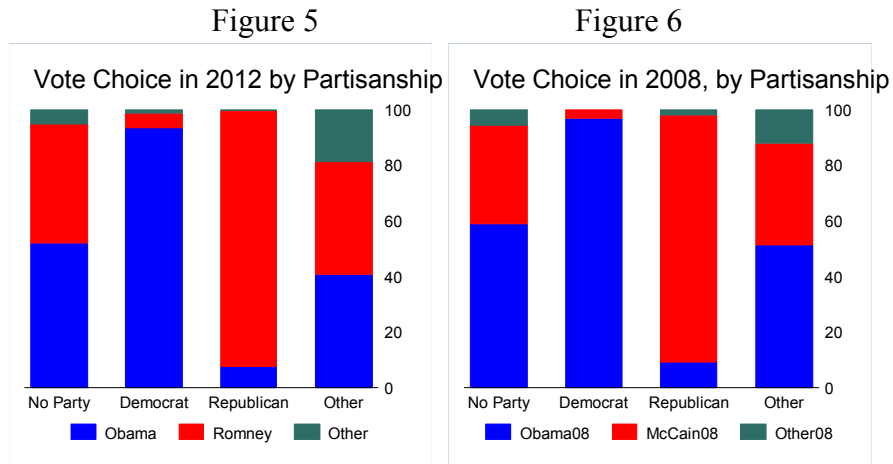
Predictably, Romney voters generally felt the country is moving in the wrong direction, and Obama voters believed that it is moving in the right direction (see Figure 4). Voters who were not sure about the direction of the country were split 74% for Obama, 25% for Romney, and 1.5% for third-party candidates.

Figure 4

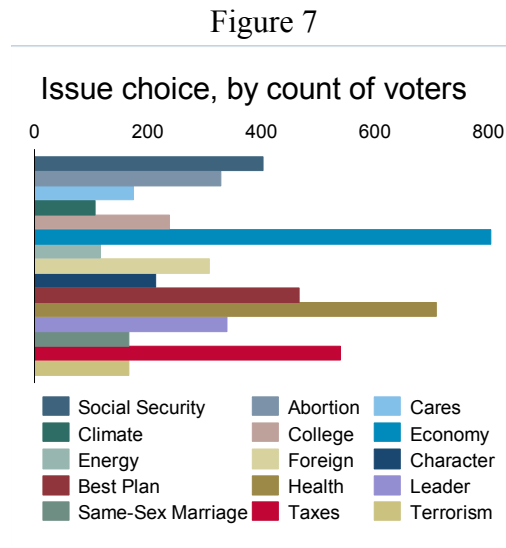


Figures 4 and 5 demonstrated to students that partisan voters voted to support their party's candidate. Voters who claimed "no party" or a third-party supported both Obama and Romney at

high levels. Our respondents reported consistent partisan voting in 2008 and 2012 (see Figures 5 and 6).



Voters most frequently identified the economy (44%) and health care (39%) as the top issues of concern (see Figure 7).



Republicans and Democrats often disagree on issue priorities. The following table ranks the issues by their degree of partisan polarization (Table 2). The percentage listed is the absolute value of the difference between Republican and Democratic levels of support.

Table 2. Partisan differences over issues:

Issue	% ( Dem-Rep )
Energy	0%
Same-sex marriage	3%
Abortion	4%
Social Security	4%
Character	4%
Leader	6%
Terrorism	7%
Foreign	7%
Best plan	8%
Cares	9%
Climate	10%
College	12%
Health	16%
Taxes	16%
Economy	17%

This brief presentation of results suggests the potential for student engagement in the nitty-gritty of research, from design, to preparation for dealing with human subjects, to on-the-ground data collection, to analysis, to interpretation of results. They can see the process for exactly what it is. To do polling right, one must be committed to the fundamentals of survey research, be able to amass the necessary resources, and be able to share results in a meaningful way, even if the results are not as anticipated. How did students react to this task? The following section provides student feedback on the experience and assessing the degree to which this coordinated effort led to multiple levels of cognition.

### **Assessing Student Learning**

We asked students to rate their learning on several topics on a 10-point scale. Students identified the degree to which the experience offered them new insight into the discipline and specifically elections, deepened their understanding of survey research and the scientific process, improved their interpersonal skills, and aided their understanding of the course learning objectives. We also asked about their overall sense of benefit, gauged their feeling of involvement with the project, and offered some opportunities for feedback to open-ended questions.

Almost all students responded positively to the experience. In sum, 95% of students would recommend the experience to other students, with the only exceptions being non-majors taking large courses (see Table 3). The highest ratings for learning are related to the election (mean of 8.4/10) and survey research (mean of 8.3/10). Practicing interpersonal skills was also rated very highly (mean of 8/10) which suggests that this type of experience is needed and valued by undergraduates.

Table 3: Student Evaluations

	Mean (SD)	Percentage with an answer of 9 or 10
How beneficial was this experience in ...		
...gaining new insights into political science?	8.2 (1.8)	66%
...furthering your interest in political science?	7.7 (2.7)	63%
...gaining a better understanding of elections and what they were about?	8.1 (1.9)	69%
...furthering your interest in the election?	8.4 (1.9)	74%
...furthering your understanding of survey research?	8.3 (2.0)	81%
...furthering your understanding of the scientific process?	7.1 (2.4)	52%
...practicing your interpersonal skills?	8.0 (2.5)	67%
...understanding the course objectives? (N=52)	8.1 (1.6)	73%
<hr/>		
Did you feel an overall sense of benefit from your participation in the exit poll?	.94 (.25)	% "yes" 94%
Would you recommend the exit poll experience to other students?	.95 (.22)	95%
<hr/>		
		% "very" involved
How actively involved have you been in the whole process? (4-point scale)	3.2 (0.6)	32%

N=62 unless otherwise marked.

When comparing student feedback and class type, it is apparent that freshmen students felt they learned the most about elections from this experience (see Table 4). The experience made the biggest impact on these first-time voters. These students also felt they learned the most about the scientific process from this experience, again, likely due to their inexperience. By contrast, the research methods students felt they learned less about science from the experience, possibly because they were working on individualized research projects at the same time. The seminar students seemed to benefit the most across categories, suggesting that students gain the most when they have the exit poll experience as part of a small, focused course on a specialty topic like elections, campaigns, or public opinion.

Table 4: Learning by Class Type

	Freshmen Survey	Research Methods	Advanced Seminar
How beneficial was this experience in ...	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
...gaining new insights into political science?	8.4, (1.5)	6.8, (2.86)	<b>8.5, (1.4)</b>
...furthering your interest in political science?	7.4, (2.86)	5.8, (3.68)	<b>8.7, (1.56)</b>
...gaining a better understanding of elections and what they were about?	<b>9.0, (1.12)</b>	6.4, (2.95)	8.1, (1.65)
...furthering your interest in the election?	8.6, (1.47)	6.8, (2.97)	<b>8.9, (1.56)</b>
...furthering your understanding of survey research?	8.5, (1.72)	7.0, (3.27)	<b>8.6, (1.4)</b>
...furthering your understanding of the scientific process?	<b>7.4, (2.18)</b>	6.4, (3.06)	7.1, (2.46)
...practicing your interpersonal skills?	7.8, (2.33)	7.2, (3.29)	<b>8.5, (2.2)</b>
...gaining new insights into political science?	8.4, (1.5)	6.8, (2.86)	<b>8.5, (1.4)</b>

*N=24 Freshmen Survey; N=10 Research Methods; N=23 Advanced Seminar*

There are several features of students that might impact their experience. These include whether they are majoring in the field, their class year, and their experience with statistics, in addition to the type of course in which they are enrolled. A series of regressions with these factors revealed just a few significant relationships. Majors find the project to stimulate their interest in the discipline more than non-majors ( $p < .01$ ). The students in lower class years (freshmen, sophomores) learned more about survey research ( $p < .05$ ) than advanced students.

We asked the students open-ended questions about their exit polling experience as well. One of these was directed at their learning processes: “In what ways did participation in the exit poll project enhance your learning in this course?” A review of these open-ended comments confirms that students experienced higher levels of learning through the exit polling process (see Table 4).

Table 5: Student Feedback confirming Bloom's Taxonomy

Category	Question
Knowledge	It enhanced my way of learning because the exit polls made me understand the lessons more than ever and it made me think about the questions that were being asked. It put a lot of things in perspective for me personally.
Application and Analysis	Completing an exit poll was an enjoyable activity that was able to apply what we have been learning in class to an out of class activity. By producing an exit poll and having other schools across the nation to compare the results to, the assignment became more fruitful. Although the majority of Escambia's results were well predictable, the variations across the nation were interesting to look at nevertheless.
Analysis (and real world application)	It resulted in data which helped to understand the way in which my own preconceptions of the character of my county do and do not actually conform to electoral reality.
Synthesis	It allowed me to fully understand what is involved when looking at exit poll data, and that it is important to look at their methodology so that we can decide as an individual as to whether it is trust-worthy or not.
Evaluation	Personally I felt like I got to step to the other side of the spectrum, where I was able to interact as political analyst rather than just a student or voter.

### Conclusion

This project has several strengths. The collaboration of faculty at three universities in geographically diverse locations and with diverse institutional settings permitted students an opportunity to engage in experiential learning beyond the confines of their immediate classrooms. They explored their own communities and those of other students as well. The collaborative faculty effort moved beyond sharing data to designing learning modules during the planning phase of course development, structuring meaningful assessment mechanisms, comparing experiences throughout the learning process, and analyzing results of the exit poll as well as the student feedback across institutions. Election 2012 engaged students and faculty on a much larger scale because of the exit poll project.

Of particular note is the degree to which this project drew from theory to ground pedagogical practice and assessment of student learning outcomes. The learning modules students completed to prepare for the exit poll required that they engage every level of Bloom's taxonomy – knowledge, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Students reflected these levels of learning in their open-ended comments about the overall project. The design also required students to hone skills across learning domains. They covered content, exercised critical thinking, practiced oral communication, and grappled with project management.

The assessment piece of this experience includes a rich combination of closed-ended and open-ended response fields, permitting faculty to more accurately capture the size and shape of the impact on student learning. Finally, the diverse classroom settings (in terms of class size, course level, and course content) sheds light on the effectiveness of exercises such as this one in enhancing the learning experience for students studying political science. While all students



learned from the activity, course context mattered. Finally, the design of this project permits easy and flexible replication for those instructors interested in bringing exit polling into their own classrooms. All materials used for this project are available through an instructor's guide published by Soomo.

Additionally, "the incorporation of students' experiences into classes and courses is crucial for political science educators to "build bridges to students' own conceptions of appropriate political analysis and action" (Colby et al. 2003, 19) and to illustrate how political issues relate to public policy and electoral politics. The learning process should also be related to students' participatory acts and experiences (participation) within our democratic societies" (Sloam 2010, 327). The Exit Polling project is ideal for meeting these aims. After having such a positive experience with this project, we intend to fine-tune the resources and to continue using this learning module during future elections.

Concrete experiences and opportunities for reflection offer students an environment that fosters effective learning. Just as Lelieveldt and Rossen (2009) determined, we found this experience "help[ed] bridge the gap between methodology and substance; put academia in touch with the local community, and [generated] useful data for research" (122). Students were able to apply theories and concepts to practical problems and situations. The exit-polling project also allowed students to work closely with faculty members. This is something that many pedagogical models encourage. Students want to develop a relationship with their faculty and have opportunities to work with faculty outside of class. We, as professors, were thrilled to see our students "in the field." As we visited the polling sites throughout the day, we had a chance to not only hear positive comments from the community members about our students, but also watch our students come out of their shells as they interacted with participants. The comments our students gave about the assignment were also positive.

While there are many goals for professors when teaching courses in political science, at least one must be to engage students in the political process. Making the content of political science as relevant as possible to students' everyday lives is essential if we want to teach students that our subject is interesting, vital, and essential and not something that is boring, disliked, or inconsequential. One way to keep students interested is to have them do things outside of the classroom, apply what they have learned, and be a part of the community. Ultimately, we found the exit-polling project to be one that could accomplish many objectives. One often overlooked important aspect of teaching political science is "understanding how conceptions of politics are formed" (Sloam 2010, 326). We all want our students to become citizens who participate in the political process and see the importance of being an engaged citizen. Voting is only one part of being an engaged citizen. Students commented that before the assignment they didn't realize how important voting really was to their community. They were pleasantly surprised to see so many people at the polls and the positive attitudes most voters had. Many community participants commented that they thought it was great to see students engaged and more importantly interested in hearing their opinions. Deliberation is at the heart of democracy. The exit-polling project provided an opportunity for students to connect with their community and to have an experience to "discuss" with their peers and family. Hopefully, this experiential learning process will instill the idea that being politically engaged is a valuable and necessary part of the democratic process.

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***Americans Governing***  
**Exit Poll Series**  
**Instructor Guide**  
**Fall 2012**



## ***Americans Governing - Exit Poll Series - How It Works***

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### **Instructor Access**

You can access all of your courses by visiting [soomopublishing.com/signin](http://soomopublishing.com/signin) and logging in with the following credentials.

**Email:**

**Password:**

Your Fall 2012 courses that have the Exit Poll Series assignments are listed below.

**POS 2041 - American Politics**

**POS 3990 - Public Opinion**

To switch between active courses, use the dropdown menu in the upper left corner of the resource as indicated below.

## Student Access

- Students should begin by visiting [soomopublishing.com/signin](http://soomopublishing.com/signin) and then registering as a "New Student."
- If you're using the Exit Poll Series in your *Americans Governing* course or with *Central Ideas in American Government*, there is no additional cost. If you are **only** using the Exit Poll Series assignments, the cost for students is \$10.
- Students complete their registration online using either a credit card or a passkey. If you've instructed your bookstore to order passkeys, students can purchase passkeys through their bookstore and use the passkey code to register. The passkeys include registration instructions.
- For each of your sections, a custom Quick Start Guide has been prepared, which can be distributed to students in print or digital form. For more detailed instructions, students can find a step-by-step guide at [soomopublishing.com/quickstart](http://soomopublishing.com/quickstart).

## Content and Response Forms

- Each of the six exit polling assignments features artifacts for students to consider. These artifacts include videos and links to news articles. Audio and video artifacts include transcripts or have closed-captioning.
- Students respond to the artifacts by answering questions in the following formats:
  - Multiple-choice questions – Students select an answer and their responses are immediately scored. Rejoinders are provided so that students can learn from incorrect responses.
  - Short-answer questions – Students type a response to a prompt and save it.
- Students can track their submitted work in the Notebook, which appears in the top right corner of each page in *Americans Governing* and appears in the table of contents in *Central Ideas in American Government*.

## Support

- Click on "Support" that appears on the black toolbar at the top of the screen.
- Email Soomo Support
  - [support@soomopublishing.com](mailto:support@soomopublishing.com)
- Call Soomo Support
  - 888-834-7223
- Visit the Soomo Support page at [soomopublishing.com/support](http://soomopublishing.com/support) and use the chat feature during normal business hours.

## Reviewing Student Work

- To view individual student work, instructors should click the "Notebook" link that appears in the top right corner of each page in *Americans Governing* and appears on the table of contents in *Central Ideas in American Government*.



# Exit Polling – Planning and Resources

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## Instructor To Do List

- Submit your IRB. (See sample IRB proposal below.)
- Contact your local/county Board of Elections to let them know your students will be conducting the poll.
- Find out where students are allowed to stand while polling (e.g., number of feet from the polling place). Rules vary from state to state and county to county, so be sure to find out the rules in your area. Include this information in the letter students will have with them. (See sample letter below.)
- Identify polling sites in advance, at least two to three weeks prior to Election Day and ask the Director or Supervisor of Elections to notify precinct workers at those sites that your students will be conducting exit polls there.
- (Optional) If you're interested in local media coverage, contact local media outlets or ask your university's PR department to contact them on your behalf two to three weeks prior to Election Day. If they're interested in doing a story about your students, you'll want to remind them a week in advance.
- Assemble all materials/supplies. (See sample materials lists below.)
- Have students complete the first four exit polling assignments prior to Election Day.

## Assignments

The following assignments are included in the *Americans Governing* Exit Poll Series. As the instructor, you can assign all of them or pick and choose the ones you like. You can also edit the assignments to add or change questions, edit content, or even upload handouts.

- What's an Exit Poll? - After an introduction to exit polling, students analyze polling data from the 2010 midterm elections and consider the strengths and weaknesses of exit polls.
- Exit Poll Controversies - Students learn about the exit polling controversies from the 2000 and 2004 elections.
- Accurate Exit Polls - Collecting exit poll data requires a good sample and a good survey instrument. Students will learn about sampling methods and think about question wording and order on an exit poll.
- Exit Poll in a Box - This assignment includes a Soomo original video that instructs students about the dos and don'ts of exit polling. Students pull together basic materials and prepare to be pollsters.
- Analyzing the Results - In this assignment, students will analyze the data collected during the exit poll, compare it to actual election results, and reach conclusions about why voters voted the way they did.
- Your Turn: What Do You Think About Exit Polling? – In this assignment, students provide feedback about their experiences as pollsters and what they learned about elections, voter behavior, and collecting data.

## Additional Information to Cover with Your Students

### Preparation in Class

- Review a sample script so that students are familiar with what they should say on while polling.
- Have students do some short role-playing exercises to prepare for a variety of situations that they may encounter on while polling.
  - Possible scenarios:
    - Someone who wants to debate a political issue, something about the candidates, or the survey questions
    - Someone who asks questions about the questions
    - Someone who is hostile/angry
- Remind students that conducting the exit poll may lead to uncomfortable social interactions with people. Practicing what they will do if they encounter a problem is the best way to be prepared. Granted we cannot prepare for every eventuality but we can do our best to be aware that difficult situations may arise and have a few prepared responses to deal with these encounters.
- Use a measuring tape to show students exactly how far they need to stand from the entrance to the polling site.
- Remind students about appropriate attire.
- Review the sampling method students should use.

#### Precinct Sign Up

- Prepare a sign up sheet/sign out sheet with precinct locations and times. Note that early morning (7:00-9:00 A.M. before work), lunch time (12:00-1:00), and evening times (5:00-7:00) should be the busiest times.
- Precincts should be determined well in advance. Students should sign up in pairs for specific precincts for two-hour time slots. Ideally, students should visit a minimum of two precincts and spend a minimum of four hours conducting the exit poll.

#### Polling Day

- Students will check out all materials/packets prior to going to a polling site and will return to campus after their shift ends to check in with the professor, return all materials, and input their data (survey results).

# Sample IRB Proposal

## IRBPHS Proposal—Exit Poll Project for the November 6, 2012 General Election

### Background and Rationale

Exit polls serve a unique purpose among the array of survey data collected during elections and are typically used by media outlets to project the winner on Election Night. Exit polls are particularly valuable because they survey actual voters, whereas many surveys taken before elections may include people who do not end up casting a vote. Getting the most accurate reflection of the electorate on Election Day is important for both projections and for research. Students will not only have an engaged learning experience, but will also be a part of a process of collecting data that is usually only done by professional organizations. Students encounter survey data throughout their program of study as well as in their daily lives and having the opportunity to collect and analyze “real time” data will lead to a better understanding of not only how exit polls are conducted and reported, but will also provide a glimpse into how (your county) County fits into the broader electoral landscape. Students participating in this hands-on and practical opportunity will not only engage with the local community but will also practice and enhance a number of important job related skills including: gathering research, analysis of data, verbal and written communication skills, and working in a collaborative manner.

Alison Howard (Dominican University of California), Jenna Emery (University of West Florida), and Jocelyn Evans (University of West Florida) in conjunction with Soomo Publishing developed this exit poll assignment. Multiple universities throughout the country will be using this assignment on Election Day (November 6, 2012), and the data collected will be aggregated by Soomo Publishing in an online platform so that students will have access to it to compare and contrast results from across the country and to compare to the exit polls reported by the media on Election Night (see Appendix B for list of survey questions).

### Description of Sample

As part of the assignment, students will review all of the County precincts and determine the best locations for getting the most representative sample; however, other factors including transportation, timing, and student schedules will be considered in the final decision. The sample will therefore be a judgmental sample and not a purely random sample; however, the sample of respondents will be a random sample. Students will ask every third person exiting the polling place to complete the questionnaire in order to collect a “random” sample. The (your county) County Registrar of Voters will notify the poll workers that students will be conducting the exit poll at the identified precincts.

### Recruitment Procedure

Students will be located outside (your county) precincts (feet from the polling place as per state requirements). A request will be made for the (your county) Director of Elections to notify precinct officials that students will be participating in an exit poll on Election Day, so there is no confusion about where they can stand. The poll workers have typically heard about the “100 foot rule” and may try to enforce it with the students if they don’t have prior notification letting them know that exit polling is allowed (feet) from the entrance of the polling place. Students will ask every third person to collect a “random” sample.

### Subject Consent Process

Participation is voluntary. Students will ask people exiting the polling place if they would like to answer a brief questionnaire. All questionnaires are anonymous and do not have any information that identifies participants by name. The data collected will be used for academic/scholarly purposes only.

### Procedures

This exit poll project will be used as an assignment in (\_\_class name\_\_) scheduled for the Fall 2012 semester. Prior to conducting the exit poll, students will complete Soomo Publishing assignments to prepare them to participate in an exit poll. Students will watch a training video created by Soomo Publishing and I, as the instructor for the course, will also provide additional training sessions for the students.

--We will examine the survey instrument and discuss the rationale for the questions and how the questions connect to the research in political science.

--We will go over directions to the polling places.

--We will review the rules provided by the (\_\_precinct/local voting office).

--We will discuss appropriate attire and behavior.

--Students will check out all materials/packets prior to going to a polling site and will return to campus after their shift ends to check in with me.

--The packets will include: directions, rules of conduct, a letter to the precinct supervisor (see Appendix A), blank surveys, name badge (with the (\_\_your university\_\_) logo to give voters a clear impression that this project is for academic research purposes), pencils, and clipboards.

--Students will be assigned to specific precincts and will sign up to serve 2-hour shifts throughout the day on November 6, 2012.

--Students will go in pairs to the precincts.

--Students will likely visit at least 2 precincts (perhaps more depending on their schedules).

--Upon returning to campus students, will enter their data to a spreadsheet hosted by Soomo Publishing that has been designed for this project. I plan to secure the use of a computer lab for students or use the mobile Mac Lab if I cannot schedule time in one of the computer labs.

### Potential Risks to Subjects

Participants may find the questions objectionable. While this is not necessarily a risk to subjects it may cause some participants to be uncomfortable.

### Minimization of Potential Risk

Having students participate in a training session prior to conducting the exit poll minimizes the potential risk. Students will remind participants that their answers will remain completely anonymous, that the data collected will be solely for academic purposes, and if a participant is uncomfortable with a particular question(s) he/she will not be forced to answer it. Participants may stop at any time.

### Potential Benefits to Subjects

While there is no direct benefit to participants, they may develop a sense that their opinions matter which may lessen cynicism and increase the likelihood that they will continue to vote in the future. Knowing that they have contributed to scholarly research may increase the level of political efficacy people feel. There is a strong correlation between political efficacy and civic

participation.

Costs to the Subjects

There are no financial costs to the subjects. There is a time cost for subjects to complete the survey. The survey is short and should require no more than 10 minutes to complete. Unlike many exit poll surveys that are quite long, we intentionally kept this survey to one page so that we do not burden participants.

Reimbursement or Compensation to Subjects

No reimbursement or compensation will be provided for participation in the research.

Confidentiality of Records

All collected data is anonymous.

# Sample Letter of Introduction to Precinct Officials

(ON UNIVERSITY LETTERHEAD)

November 6, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

The student who is in possession of this letter is participating in an official exit poll sponsored by (\_\_Name of University\_\_). The student has agreed to abide by all rules provided by the County of (\_\_name of county\_\_) Registrar of Voters/Board of Elections/Director of Elections and has participated in a training session. The student has agreed to act in a professional and courteous manner at all times. Students will stop random voters to ask for their participation in completing a brief questionnaire. No one will be forced to participate, and no respondent will be asked to identify himself/herself with a name or other identifying information.

Please contact (\_\_faculty member's name and contact phone number\_\_) if there are any questions about the polling project or to report any problems or concerns.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Name of Faculty Member

Title

Department

University

## Sample Student Checklist for Election Day

All participants should be certain that they have in their possession the following items before leaving to participate in the exit poll:

- Plastic Credential Badge
- Letter of introduction from your professor
- 2 Clipboards
- Surveys
- Pens/Pencils
- Directions to the polling place
- Rules for administering poll
- Envelope for completed polls

## Sample List of Rules for Students

### RULES FOR EXIT POLLING

**POLL DATES: Monday, October 27 – Tuesday, November 4**

1. Check the time that you are to participate in the poll.
2. **On the day of the poll:** Each pollster should report to (\_\_ professor name \_\_) office approximately 10-15 minutes **prior** to the start time for his/her participation. (If you are in class immediately prior, you may report as quickly as possible after the class lets out.) **Upon arriving at (\_\_ professor name \_\_) office, you will be asked to check out the exit poll materials that you will be using.** ***Note: ALL participants must "sign in" prior to beginning the poll and must "sign out" after concluding your service. This policy is to ensure that all participants receive appropriate credit and/or extra credit for participating in the poll.***

**All participants should be certain that they have in their possession the following items before leaving to participate in the exit poll:**

- **Plastic Credential Badge**
  - **Letter of introduction from (\_\_ professor name \_\_)**
  - **2 Clipboards**
  - **Surveys**
  - **Pens/Pencils**
  - **Directions to the polling place**
  - **Rules for administering poll**
  - **Spare envelope**
3. Once you have been given the "go ahead" from (\_\_ professor name \_\_) or from one of the students working the office, proceed to the polling place to which you have been assigned. **(Note: Directions to ALL precincts will be made available.)**
  4. At the polling place, present the letter from (\_\_ professor name \_\_) that is in your materials packet to the precinct officials and proceed to a point **outside** the polling place that is **outside** the (\_\_ your number \_\_)-foot buffer zone. **If you are uncertain about where it is okay to stand, ASK THE PRECINCT WORKER TO WHOM YOU PRESENTED YOUR CREDENTIAL LETTER.**
- NOTE: YOU MUST WEAR YOUR CREDENTIAL BADGE AT ALL TIMES WHILE ADMINISTERING THE EXIT POLL.**
5. Once you have positioned yourself, you can begin the process of administering the poll:
    - You should attempt to ask voters if they would be willing to take just a few moments to complete a survey sponsored by the (\_\_ your institution \_\_).



- If a respondent has a question about any aspect of the poll, do your best to answer it politely. **Use your best judgment.** Remember:
  - ❖ The poll is **COMPLETELY** anonymous. We won't know who they are or have any identifying information about the respondents who agree to participate. You may need to tell potential respondents this to alleviate their concerns.
  - ❖ The data collected will be used for academic and scholarly purposes **ONLY**. (Some data will be used for scholarly research projects.)
  - ❖ If a person is uncomfortable answering a specific question, encourage him or her to complete the survey in its entirety, but do not force them to answer the offensive question.
  
- **Remember, ALWAYS be polite and courteous: You are representing the university.**

6. Once you have completed the number of surveys you were assigned to complete, **RETURN THE COMPLETED SURVEYS** to (  professor name  ) office.

If, for any reason, you are not able to return immediately following the conclusion of your exit poll participation on Nov. 6, you **MUST** phone in your results **IMMEDIATELY UPON CONCLUDING YOUR PARTICIPATION**. This phone line can be used for this purpose: (  phone number  ).

7. Upon returning your surveys you will need to "sign out" on the same list that you used when you signed in prior to participating in the poll. This indicates that you have fulfilled your polling responsibilities.
  
8. **NOTE: Students who fail to return their surveys by 7:00 PM on Tuesday, November 6 or phone in the results by that same time WILL NOT RECEIVE CREDIT for participating in the exit poll.**

Sample Badge



*Jennifer Wells*



## Sample Student Polling Schedule

Early Voting Dates		Supervisor's Office Main Branch	Supervisor's Office Cantonment Branch	Tryon Branch Library, PJC	Southwest Branch Library, Gulf Beach Highway
Su 10/26	11:30-1:30				
M 10/27	8:30-10:30 11:30-1:30 2:30-4:30				
W 10/29	8:30-10:30 11:30-1:30 2:30-4:30				
F 10/31	8:30-10:30 11:30-1:30 2:30-4:30				
S 11/1	8:30-10:30 11:30-1:30 2:30-4:30				

# 2012 National Presidential Exit Poll

## 1. For whom did you vote for president?

Barack Obama  Mitt Romney  Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. When deciding for whom to vote, what role did the presidential debates play in your decision?

- The debates were an important factor.
- The debates were a somewhat important factor.
- The debates were not an important factor.

## 3. When did you make your decision on whom to vote for in the presidential election?

- in the last few days
- in the last week
- in the last month
- before then

## 4. Of the following, which 3 mattered the most to you in deciding how to vote for president?

- taxes
- abortion
- terrorism
- college affordability/access
- Social Security/Medicare
- health care
- economy/jobs
- same-sex marriage
- climate change/mitigation
- energy
- foreign policy/defense
- leadership ability/good prior experience
- cares about people like me
- has strong personal character
- has the best plan for the country

## 5. In your vote for the U.S. House of Representatives, how important was President Obama and his policies?

- very important
- somewhat important
- not too important
- not at all important

## 6. If President Obama is reelected, which party would you rather see in control of the U.S. Congress?

- Democrats
- Republicans

## 7. No matter how you voted today, do you usually think of yourself as a

- Democrat  Republican
- other party  no party

## 8. In general, do you think things in the country are

- going in the right direction
- going in the wrong direction
- not sure

## 9. In 2008, did you vote for

- Barack Obama  John McCain
- other \_\_\_\_\_  did not vote

## 10. Which view of government comes closest to your own?

- Government should do more to solve problems and help meet the needs of people.
- Government is doing too many things that would be better left to businesses and individuals.

## 11. Compared to four years ago, is your family's financial situation:

- better today
- worse today
- about the same

## 12. Race and Ethnicity

- White  African American/Black
- Hispanic  Asian
- other \_\_\_\_\_

## 13. What is your gender?

- female  male

## 14. What is your birth year? \_\_\_\_\_