Sports, Politics, and Public Opinion

Course Description
Sports and politics have become increasingly intertwined over the last half-century. Local, state, and federal governments as well as other governing bodies (e.g., the NCAA, universities) regulate who can participate (raising questions about eligibility and equality) and what standards athletes must meet (e.g., drug testing, academic performance). These organizations also oversee economic issues (e.g., resource distribution) and symbolic issues (e.g., mascots). Ideally, governing policies would be responsive to the wishes of their constituents (players, owners, voters), but are they? How would we know? How do we gauge their opinions? Alternatively, how do sports affect public opinion? Do citizens prefer politicians who engage in sports? Do media portrayals of sports affect what citizens think about race and/or gender? Is it appropriate for athletes to use their notoriety to make political statements? These are the kinds of questions we will consider in this class. This involves learning the science of public opinion polling and applying it to study opinions about public policies relevant to sports.

The focus of this class is on what individuals think about sports and how sports affect their behaviors. The class thus does not explore technical aspects of legal rules governing sports. It is also necessary, due to limited time, to be selective in topics. Therefore, the class largely excludes some obviously important topics such as labor relations, the Olympics, FIFA, etc. The class will primarily, although not entirely, focus on college athletics.

Assignments and Grades
The class meets in Scott Hall 107 (Burdick Room) on Tuesdays from 1:00pm-3:50pm (also see note 1). Students are expected to attend all classes, complete assigned readings and assignments on time, and actively participate. Most classes will involve a short lecture, class presentations, small group discussions, class discussions, and work on the class project.

Students will be involved in three formal activities, as follows.

1. Class Papers/Presentations. Each student will write three two-page, single-spaced papers. These papers will be written from weeks three to nine of the class. The course outline provides seven possible questions for each of these weeks; students will be assigned which question to answer the week prior to the class.
   a. There must be a total of at least four sources referenced and cited. This needs to include at least two sources that are not on the syllabus, and that are academic articles or books (e.g., use Google Scholar).
   b. The structure of the paper should be: 1) introduction; 2) addressing the question – in so doing, move beyond simple description, discuss the issues at stake and/or sides of the debate (and how this relates to politics/regulation/oversight), and take a

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1 On January 28, the class will initially meet at the Walter Athletics Center (see below for details) and then move to 617 Library Place. On February 11, the class will meet from 2:00pm-3:30pm. There is no formal class on February 18. There is a “presentation” class on the first day of Reading week, March 10.
position; 3) specification of how one would study this topic from a public opinion perspective, including the most interesting population to study and a few sample questions; 4) conclusion; and 5) references.

c. Students should prepare to informally present their paper to the class for 3-4 minutes (most will not present each week, but all should be prepared).

d. Turn in a stapled hardcopy to the Professor on the day of the class. If the aforementioned steps are taken and the paper is carefully proofed, full credit will be granted.

These papers will comprise a total of 20% of each student’s grade.

2. Class Research Project. We will be conducting a survey of student-athletes from a sample of National Collegiate Athletic Association schools. The goal of the survey is to explore the student athletes’ attitudes about topics we discuss in class, including athletes making political statements, use of social media, drug use behavior, support for pay-for-play (and the new CA law), gender equity, etc. The specific steps will involve the following:

a. We will draw a sample of schools. Each student will be assigned several schools. The student will then identify all student-athletes for every sport and find their e-mail addresses. These may not be available in some cases, but in most cases they are directly available on the school’s athletic department homepage. If no e-mails from a particular school are available, we will replace that school with another. The student will record the student-athlete’s name, e-mail, school name, and sport (in a spreadsheet).

b. Based on students’ class papers and general class discussion, we will select items to include in the survey (questions and possible experiments). This will involve some small group discussion. Specific items will be chosen based on class votes, with some guidance provided by the Professor.

c. We will file (and obtain) Institutional Review Board approval.

d. We will collect and, time permitting, analyze the results.

e. There will be class time allotted for e-mail collection.

The project(s) will comprise a total of 15% of each student’s grade.

3. Research Paper. Each student will produce a research paper, focused on some aspect of sports that is amenable to exploring public opinion on the issue. This will involve choosing a topic near the start of the quarter, identifying relevant academic literature (at least a dozen sources) and reviewing it, collecting or acquiring data, analyzing the data (in a very basic manner), and writing a paper describing the results. The papers should be approximately 15 pages (excluding bibliography and tables/graphs). Students will be asked to provide reports to the class throughout the quarter. This will comprise a total of 50% of each student’s grade. It is due, in the Professor’s box, by 12:00pm on Wednesday, March 18.

In the course of writing the paper, two Ph.D. students will be available for questions and help with obtaining data, if needed. You will be assigned to work with one of these two Teaching Assistants (TAs). They are Nicolette Alayon
The remaining 15% of each student’s grade will be based on attendance and the quality of participation. There also may be a few small assignments that form part of the participation grade. If a student misses a class, it is the student’s responsibility to provide written documentation of a legitimate excuse (see course policies); otherwise, it will be counted as an unexcused absence. Also, if a student misses class (excused or unexcused), it is the student’s responsibility to learn about any missed assignments, discussion, and so on. The student should do this by talking to other students prior to contacting the Professor. Participation involves taking part in class activities, discussing class readings in an informed way, and discussing ongoing relevant events. While the quantity of the contribution to class discussion is not definitive, some regular participation is expected. Also, surprise quizzes based on readings are possible and will affect participation grades.

A table with due dates appears at the end of the syllabus.

**Readings**

All readings can be found online or will be available from the Professor (as noted on the course outline). Some of the links to readings are accessible only when you log into the Northwestern VPN/library, or only if you create a free account with the *New York Times*. If a student has trouble finding a reading, please contact the Professor. Note that a few of the readings include statistics that may be unfamiliar. Do not worry about the specific statistical analyses. Instead, focus on the overall argument and implications described in the given reading. Also, readings may change – students will be alerted to any changes at least one week prior to the given class (e.g., some readings may be dropped and others possibly added).

Many of the readings are news articles. Students are expected to access more academic literature for their papers.

Students are expected to read all of the assigned readings before each class. Surprise quizzes on the readings are possible (and will become part of the students’ participation grade). If a student misses a class without a legitimate excuse, he or she will receive a 0 on any quizzes. It also will be necessary for students to include direct references to the readings in their assignments.

**Course Policies**

- It is the student’s responsibility to obtain an assignment if he or she is absent during the class in which the assignment is distributed or discussed. Assignments are due at the start of the class period on the days they are due. Make-up assignments in class and/or late papers will be permitted only if the student presents written documentation of legitimate circumstances that prevented the student from completing the assignment on time. This documentation must be provided in a timely manner (i.e., within a week); failure to provide such documentation will result in the student receiving a 0 on the assignment in question. Legitimate circumstances include religious holidays, illness (verified by a note from a health care provider), serious family emergencies, subpoenas, jury duty, military service, and participation in group activities.
sponsored by the University. This means late assignments are not acceptable (a score of 0 will be assigned for late assignments absent a legitimate excuse).

- Assignments are not accepted via e-mail (unless the Professor explicitly states that e-mail is allowed). An assignment must be turned in as a hard copy at the start of the class in which it is due. Assignments must be stapled at this time, or they will not be accepted.

- Grading will be done by the Professor or a teaching assistant. If a student wishes to appeal an assigned grade, he or she must submit a written statement to the Professor explaining why the grade should be changed. This must be done within one week after the assignment is returned to the student.

- Incompletes will be granted only in the case of documented illness, and if the student and Professor complete the required form.

- Students are expected to type each written assignment. The assignments should be proofread; spelling, grammar, and writing style will make up part of a student’s grade. Also, students are expected to make reference to the academic literature when appropriate including journal articles and books.
Course Outline

January 7    Public Goods, Government, and the Regulation of Sports

- **Assignment:** We will identify approximately five attitudes in class (e.g., attitude towards sports, particular teams, etc.). We will form 3-4 teams in class and each team will develop a measure for each concept, and implement a simple survey with at least 50 respondents. The data will be collected between this class and the next, from around campus. The teams should be prepared to present the measures and the results to class on 1/14. *(This is unrelated to the class survey with student-athletes.)*

- **Readings (to be read by 1/7):** Skim the following articles on concussions and football:

- **Class activity:** A simulation to explore the nature of public goods.

- **Class debate:** Should youth football be legal?

January 14  Studying Public Opinion

- **Assignment:** One paragraph description of research topic, and identification of five sources (on the topic) not listed on the syllabus. Three of these must be *academic sources* (e.g., journal articles or books – not news!). List the sources in bibliographic form (i.e., do not just provide links to the sources). Set up meetings with your TA for advice on project. Due 1/21.

- **Assignment:** Next week is the first class in which a class paper/presentation is due. See next week’s class listing for the topics. *We will assign topics on 1/14; the papers are due 1/21. This will then be the case through 3/3, although it is not listed as an “assignment” each week on the syllabus.*
Readings (to be read by 1/14):


January 21  College Sports

Note: January 24th is the last day to change grade status for a class to P/N.

Assignment: Identify at least 12 total sources on the research topic (a total of five must be academic) and provide a list with a paragraph on each (i.e., produce an annotated bibliography; list the sources in bibliographic form – do no just provide links). Due 1/28.

Class Paper Topics

1. What was the O’Bannon case and how was it settled? Which side to you think had a better argument?
2. What happened with football unionization at Northwestern and how was it settled? Which side to you think had a better argument?
3. What is the history of the rule that requires basketball players to attend a year of college before entering the NBA? What do you think of the current rule?
4. What is the history of the rule that requires football players to attend three years of college before entering the NFL? What do you think of the rule?
5. What benefits can sports scholarships provide? Do they vary? How many college athletes receive scholarships? Discuss current provisions. Do you think the benefits are sufficient?
6. For how many Division 1 schools does athletic revenue exceed costs? What are the pros and cons for investment in sports?
7. What is the Knight Commission, and what does it suggest?

Readings:

- Skim: [http://www.knightcommission.org/](http://www.knightcommission.org/)
- Northwestern Articles

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2 We are addressing college sports prior to the more general topic of “sports and political statements” so as to discuss relevant issues prior to our meeting with Athletic Director Jim Phillips.


Pay for Play Articles


Skim:


California Law Articles

- NCAA Sends California Governor Letter Calling Name, Likeness Bill ‘Unconstitutional’,” by Chris Bumbaca and Steve Berkowitz, *USA*


- Spending Articles

- Scholarship Articles


- *Class activity*: Develop questions for our meeting with Athletic Director Jim Phillips next week.

**January 28 College Sports (continued) / Sports and Political Statements**

**NOTE**: The class will meet at 1:00PM at the Walter Athletics Center (2255 Campus Drive) for a one our Q&A with NU Athletic Director Jim Phillips (see https://nusports.com/staff-directory/jim-phillips/). The meeting will last one hour. We will then move to 617 Library Place for the remainder of the class from 2:00PM-3:50PM.

- *Assignment*: An approximately three-to four-page literature review of the research topic. At the end of the literature review, offer some broad ideas about the data source. Due 2/4.

**Class Paper Topics**

1. Discuss the evolution of Michael Jordan’s role in politics. Compare him with Lebron James. What do you think of their different stances?
2. Discuss efforts to boycott the 1968 Olympics. Do you think it was a worthwhile effort?
3. Discuss the reaction to Tommie Smith and John Carlos’ 1968 black power protest. Do you think they made the right decision?
4. Discuss reactions to Muhammad Ali’s opposition to the Vietnam War. Do you think he made the right decision?
5. Discuss the sequence of events involving the University of Missouri football team’s 2015 protest. Do you think the players made the right decision?
6. Discuss the political implications of Curt Flood’s lawsuit. Was Flood in the right?
7. Discuss the 1980 and 1984 Olympic boycotts. Were either or both good decisions?

- *Readings:*
  - “Politicians and Their Games: Emotional Reactions to Politicians Who Play Sports,” by Alexander L. Curry, Working Paper, University of Texas at Austin. *(Available from Professor.)*
  - Historical Protest Articles

3 Please arrive at 12:50 at the main entrance to the Walter Athletics Center. We will then check in, as a class, at the front desk, and go to the Wendy Nelson Conference Room, which is located on the 4th floor (a receptionist on the 4th floor will lead us to the Conference Room).
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01419870.1996.9993924 (Also Available from Professor.)


Michael Jordan Articles (and comparisons with LeBron James)


Missouri Articles


National Anthem Protests Articles

http://telegram.bookhouse.me/englishmagazines/kc7ij4febd3agh2__@english magazines.pdf (SEE relevant pages!).

http://www.chronicle.com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/article/Sports-Programs-Draw-Up-a-New/237887

https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-do-americans-feel-about-the-nfl-protests-it-depends-on-how-you-ask/


February 4  Gender

Assignment: For those collecting their own data, complete the survey to be used; for those using secondary data, identify the data source and how it will be acquired. Due 2/11.

Class Paper Topics
1. What does Title IX require? How many schools seem to be compliant? Do you think compliance requirements are about right, too stringent, or not stringent enough?
2. What counts as a sport when it comes to Title IX compliance? Does cheerleading? Do you think cheerleading should count?
3. Since Title IX, what has been the trend in the percentage of female college coaches? Explain. Do you think there is a problem?
4. Are some sports seen as more “female” than others? Do you think these stereotypes are accurate?
5. Discuss the US women’s soccer national team equal pay lawsuit (also touch on the 2015 artificial turf World Cup controversy). Which side do you think has a strong argument?
6. Some argue women and men should compete against one another, at least in some sports. What do you think?
7. Discuss the International Association of Athletics Federation’s (aka World Athletics since June 2019) eligibility regulations for female athletes with differences of sex development. Where do you stand?

Readings:

Title IX Articles

“What is Title IX?,” by Women’s Sports Foundation.
https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/advocacy/what-is-title-ix/

“History of Title IX,” by Women’s Sports Foundation.
https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/advocacy/history-of-title-ix/

http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J014v22n01_04

Female Classification Articles


https://www.bmj.com/content/364/bmj.l1120. (Also see coverage of the editorial at: https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-6830651/Controversial-testosterone-rule-female-athletes-unscientific-experts-warn.html).


Bias/Equality Articles

http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/106461701753287714 (Also Available from Professor.)

http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1469029213000861 (Also Available from Professor.)


https://works.bepress.com/elizabeth_sharrow/23/ (or Available from Professor if not on-line.)

February 11  Race (Note this class will meet from 2:00pm-3:30pm).

Note: February 14th is the last day to drop a class.

- Assignment: All data must be obtained. Due 2/18.

Class Paper Topics
1. What is the Rooney Rule? Do you disagree or agree with the rule?
2. Discuss trends in the hiring of minority coaches in college football and basketball (both men’s and women’s basketball). Is there a problem? See work by Shaun Harper et al. and Richard Lapchik.
3. Discuss trends in the hiring of minority coaches in professional football and basketball (both men and women’s basketball). Is there a problem?
4. Are there discrepancies in graduation rates, by race, for college student-athletes? Is there a problem?
5. Are racial stereotypes prevalent in sports (e.g. pain tolerance, natural ability)? Do you think more should be done to address stereotypes?
6. What are trends in college sports participation by race? Are there implications for professional sports? Is there a problem?
7. Is there evidence of media racial bias in the coverage of sports? Is it a problem, if so?

- Readings:
    http://journals.sagepub.com/turing.library.northwestern.edu/doi/abs/10.1177/0196859908316330 (Also Available from Professor.)
    http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0048546&version= meter+at+null&module=meter-Links&pctype=article&contentId=&mediaId=&referrer=&priority=true&action=cli ck&contentCollection=meter-links-click (Also Available from Professor.)
February 18  No Class Meeting. Set-up individualized TA meetings this week to work on data analysis.

Note: Pre-registration for spring begins on February 17 (registration begins on February 24).

Assignment: Analyze data and write 3-to-4 page description. Due 2/25.

February 25 Drugs

Class Paper Topics
1. Discuss the Lance Armstrong case and the controversy over him re-paying sponsors. Does he have a justifiable stance?
2. Is drug testing in sports an invasion of privacy? Yes or no?
3. What are the NCAA rules on drugs, and what are usage trends? Are the rules reasonable?
4. Discuss the Russian Olympic doping scandal. Do you think Russian athletes who have not tested positive are too blame at all?
5. What are arguments for legalizing all drugs in sports? What do you think?
6. Is there a discrepancy between the penalties for drug use in sports and those for domestic violence in the NFL? Summarize the rules, and discuss. What do you think of their rules?
7. Is there a discrepancy between the penalties for drug use in sports and those for domestic violence in the Major League Baseball? Summarize the rules, and discuss. What do you think of their rules?

Readings:


College Sports Articles


Legal Articles


Russia Articles


March 3 Mascots

Assignment: Complete a draft of the entire research paper. Due 3/10.

Class Paper Topics
Each of this week’s topics concerns a particular controversy involving a sports mascot. You will choose one to discuss and explain if you would oppose or support having the mascot.

2. University of Illinois. Discuss.
4. Florida State University. Discuss.
5. Cleveland Indians. Discuss.
6. Kid’s sports teams with Native mascots. Discuss.
7. Discuss the NCAA rules on Native American mascots.

Readings:

Native American Articles

offend-native-americans-but-do-they-we-took-a-poll-and-you-wont-believe-the-results


- Washington Redskins Articles
Class activity: We will finalize our class survey.

March 10      Catch-Up, Wrap-up, and Project Reports (We will have class this day even though it is the first day of Reading Period)

March 18      Final Paper Due by 12:00PM.
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