

To Survey or Not to Survey: The Use of Exit Polling as a Teaching Tool¹

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If exit polling was a widely known, but mostly misunderstood tool of political science research, the presidential election of November 7, 2000 changed that. Exit polls have long been a controversial part of most presidential elections, with the question of whether or not to publicize poll results before the close of balloting heavily discussed among academics and pundits alike. In fact, a 'gentleman's agreement' among the major television networks not to call the winner in a state before balloting in that state ended was violated on Election Day 2000.² Since then, the major networks have once again agreed never to violate such an agreement, and "NBC says it will support a bill that would create a national poll-closing time" (*Christian Science Monitor* 2000). The exit polls conducted by the Voter News Service (VNS) on election day added one more question to the debate—should the results of exit polls be used to predict the winners of elections? As television viewers watched, exit polls initially predicted the victory of Al Gore in Florida; these predictions were then dismissed as early returns indicated a probable George W. Bush victory. A renewed debate on the utility of exit polls erupted in the popular press, and, no doubt, in political science classrooms in the weeks after the elections. These events have spurred a new interest in elections and, more specifically, in exit polls. Given this heightened interest in elections and exit polls, some political scientists might be tempted to have their students perform their own exit polls in order to bring the excitement of an election to their classes.

Should one plan an exit poll as part of a political science course? Aside from the considerable amount of organizational planning required on the part of the instructor to facilitate an exit poll,

such projects usually require an extra time commitment on top of the reading and study that students expect to devote to their political science course. Many students might be inclined to pass up such a course for this reason. With such organizational and educational hurdles, we then ask, just what are the benefits of an exit poll? From the pedagogical and experiential learning literature, advocates suggest that students would not only learn the course material better, but derive benefits extending past learning the course material. Critics of class surveys suggest that although these sorts of projects may help students understand the course material better, far reaching benefits are less likely.

This study reports on students' perceptions of class exit polls administered during the 2000 U.S. presidential election. Students at four different universities (California State University, Northridge; Tulane University; the University of Iowa, Iowa City and; the University of Wisconsin, Parkside), and in different types of political science classes (Research Methods, American Political Culture, Elections in America, Municipal Governments, and Introduction to American Politics), administered the same exit poll to registered voters on election day as part of their respective political science courses. Although the same exit poll was administered, using the same procedures, varying degrees of success were recorded. At California State University, Northridge, a large public university in Los Angeles, students closed the poll station early because a gang fight erupted across the street; a second station closed early because of the perception of imminent violence. All together, the student interviewers only collected 155 completed surveys. In contrast, at Tulane University, located in New Orleans, student interviewers collected over 1000 completed surveys and reported no problems. Students at the University of Iowa, Iowa City and the University of Wisconsin, Parkside, both smaller locales, each collected over 900 completed surveys.

We were initially interested in understanding the difficulties students faced by participating in these exit polls, from location issues to problems administer-

ing the exit poll to voters. That is, were there differences in the exit polling experience due to the geographical location of the universities? This initial interest then broadened into understanding whether or not the students perceived a benefit from participating in the exit poll, despite polling difficulties. Thus, this article will address not only the challenges associated with undertaking a class exit poll, but also whether or not students perceive a benefit from having participated in one. At the close of the fall 2000 semester, students in these four political science courses were asked to complete a survey asking them about their participation in the class exit poll. The purpose of this survey was to assess not only what the students thought of the experience as it pertained to their class, but whether or not it affected their perceptions of the election, survey research, and political science in general. Given that the students who administered the election day exit polls were from different types of political science courses, in four different locations, it is also interesting to determine whether the benefits derived from the experience differed by type of course. With this in mind, it should become easier to answer the question, 'to survey or not to survey . . . ' when planning one's course activities.

Organizational Considerations of Class Exit Polls

The planning of a class exit poll involves the same steps associated with the planning of a class survey, such as a telephone survey.³ A questionnaire must be designed, a sample chosen, and data collected and analyzed. Exit polling, however, involves a substantially more complicated sampling process than does a telephone survey, and data collectors (i.e. student interviewers) face a higher degree of difficulty in collecting data than do telephone survey interviewers.

Nick Moon and Robin McGregor (1992) suggest that of all the major issues involved in conducting an exit poll, sampling decisions are most complex. Many considerations are involved in drawing a sampling frame of a

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population for exit polling purposes. These considerations include: the selection of polling stations, the selection of respondents for the exit poll, and interviewer coverage of these polling stations.⁴ Most professional polling agencies prefer to choose polling stations in precincts that have traditionally had high voter turnout. This information is generally available through governmental agencies, such as a registrar of voters. A drawback of this approach may be the non-representativeness of the sampling frame, especially with respect to ethnicity. To ensure a representative sample, one might stratify a sample of election precincts. In states in which the ethnicity of the voter is listed along with their party identification, such as Louisiana, this information can also be easily obtained through voter registration lists. Other states, such as California, do not collect such information, and a stratified sample by demographic variables is not possible. Through Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology, precinct information can be combined with census tract data in order to map census demographic information by precinct. The public availability of such information is somewhat uneven; privately most election campaigns have some variant of this information.

Once precincts have been chosen, and the actual polling stations located, an important step before polling is to check the regulations regarding exit polls. Most areas have a designated distance that must be maintained by exit poll workers from the election booths. The official in charge of the polling station should be informed that an exit poll will be conducted; sometimes the officials are unaware of the rules governing election polls. Student interviewers should be aware of the legalities regarding exit polling. At one of the polling stations in Los Angeles, for example, which was located in a hotel, the general manager would not allow the students to conduct the exit poll on the hotel premises. The manager relented only after the instructor interceded.

A final consideration when sampling is the determination of which voters to approach. This is most often done through interval sampling, where every *k*th voter is chosen. The interval value of *k* should be chosen based upon the number of registered voters in the precinct, the history of turnout in that particular precinct, and the turnout by time of day, keeping in mind that turnout is highest in the early morning and late afternoon hours. The sampling interval may have to be adjusted by polling station according to these factors

because a uniform interval across all polling stations may result in a biased sample in favor of a heavily turned out voting station.⁵ Refusals must also be figured into calculations of sampling intervals. Not surprisingly refusals may be increased by the presence of media exit polling outlets. When confronted with both, voters in our exit poll were more likely to complete the media exit poll as opposed to the class exit poll.

A class exit poll will require more supervision and paperwork than other types of class projects. Students will usually have to fill out liability forms required by the university if the activity (exit polling) takes place off campus. Transportation may be a concern for students who do not have transportation of their own. At Tulane, car pools were set up so students had rides to the polling locations. Safety is another concern, especially in urban areas. Ideally, student interviewers work together in teams, especially after nightfall. Because of most students' schedules, it is preferable to have the student interviewers work in shifts. This requires extra supervision on the part of the instructor or other supervisors, who will have to visit each polling station at least once during the shift to make sure the student interviewers are well supplied with questionnaires, pens/pencils, and other necessities. Perhaps the most important supply of all is ready access to a telephone. Supervisors are quicker to react to problems if they hear about them in a timely fashion. In the Los Angeles example, where students were told that they could not administer their exit poll on the hotel premises where the voting booths were located, a call enabled the supervisor (i.e., instructor) to come to the location and discuss the matter with the hotel manager.

A successful exit poll depends a great deal on pre-poll work, including the selection of balloting locations to be polled. On the day of the election, a high level of supervision is also needed, which may be difficult to achieve with a small number of supervisors, especially in a large urban area. Organizational difficulties notwithstanding, the administration of a class exit poll may be a good way to draw students into the excitement of an election and add to the course material.

The Experiential Learning Movement and Political Science Courses

Advocates of experiential learning cite John Dewey as an early proponent of this method of education. Observing the educational patterns of the early twentieth century, in which the method of learning was hierarchical (the teacher teaches, the students learn), Dewey advocated that by combining education with action (or practice and theory) a democratizing element could be introduced into society. Dewey saw education as a key component in the development of societal dispositions. If education was presented in a hierarchical pattern, then attitudes toward society could not help but to be hierarchical as well. By separating theory from action, education tends to reinforce the divi-

sions that already exist in society. However, in combining the theoretical with the real world, or in taking action, individuals are forced to display an interest in the real world.

“What Dewey wanted most of

all was to get us out of our boxes, ranked vertically or horizontally, and into mutually creative exchanges among all our capacities, between ourselves and others, ourselves and the world” (Minnich 1999). Through the incorporation of theoretical knowledge (i.e., classroom experience) with real world knowledge (i.e., experience) Dewey and others hoped that education could address the problems of the day. Because students would learn firsthand about the social issues of the day, it was hypothesized that they would then display an interest in resolving these issues.

Less idealistic, but no less important, experiential learning is also advocated as a method in which students can obtain a greater understanding of course materials. “Adding a brief field project to political science classes injects excitement and stimulates an interest in course material” while exposing students to some of the issues discussed in the classroom (Young 1996, 11). Injecting an experiential experience into the regular course curricula of assigned readings and lectures can help emphasize the material learned through these courses and help the students make the connection between theoretical knowledge and

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the real world. Young points to students' visits and contacts with community and governmental agencies, and attendance at local government meetings as thought-producing field experiences.

Because methods courses are historically those parts of the political science curricula that are perhaps most dreaded by students, it is even more necessary to make such courses more interesting and relevant to students.

While classroom based teaching can equip students with research skills in data collection, sampling, data analysis, presentation of research findings, and so on, it cannot substitute for practical experience in two respects. Firstly, it inevitably removes research methods from the social, political, and economic context in which research is done . . . Secondly, research entails more than the application of a given set of techniques in a particular context [Burgess, 1981]. [Students] . . . need to gain an understanding of how the various stages of research fit together in the research process (Winn 1995, 204).

That is, the often abstract material taught in research methods courses can be made more relevant to students if taught in connection with real world research experience. Students can better comprehend how a research project is conducted from start to finish if they actually take part in such a project. Even if students do not go on to become professional researchers, which a majority do not, practical research experience makes them better consumers of research findings.

Some of the ways to incorporate experiential learning experiences within a political science course include having students attend meetings of local government and observe the participants, or to initiate face to face interviews with public officials. Commonly, research methods courses with a quantitative focus require students to write a survey instrument, draw a sample from a research population, administer the survey, code the survey data, then analyze and interpret the results. Allan McBride (1994) writes that ". . . the experience of designing research, composing a questionnaire, collecting and eventually analyzing data, cannot but help students to increase their understanding of the social scientific process" (McBride 1994, 557). Gregory et al. write that after one such experience, "nearly all the students felt that they learned valuable survey, interviewing, and data analysis skills, and most felt that they 'learned practical skills'" (Gregory et al. 2001, 122).

Although most of the experiential learning studies are in a positive direction, there have been critics, especially of the use of students in conducting survey research. Lloyd P. Jones and Stephan S. Meinhold (1999) questioned whether or not students would "derive any secondary benefits from their participation [in a public opinion poll] beyond the primary goals of learning how to conduct survey research" (Jones and Meinhold 1999, 603). This is an especially pertinent consideration when such a class project is required in a non-methods course. Jones and Meinhold were interested in determining whether or not participation in a telephone poll would positively influence students' attitudes toward the local community. Using a Solomon four-group design, with two of the groups participating in a class poll, they reported no significant effect of the poll experience on students' perceptions of the local community. Recent reports, then, offer a mixed assessment of class research projects, with some agreement that within the context of a methods course, they may be beneficial, but within other courses, and past the objectives of a methods course, less benefit is perceived. Should this dissuade one from undertaking an exit poll as a class project?

The Question of 'To Poll or Not to Poll?'

This work revisits the arguments of Jones and Meinhold in a different context. Rather than assess what they referred to as 'enhanced citizenship,' we are interested in whether or not the exit poll experience was seen as beneficial to: 1) their class experience; 2) survey research in general; 3) political science in general and; 4) the election. This is more in line with the objectives of the experiential education movement, in that it attempts to explicate the connection between classroom learning of issues and these issues in the real world. Thus, rather than focus on 'enhanced citizenship' the focus should be on 'enhanced education.'

The Exit Poll

The exit poll itself was administered by classes at seven different universities; however only four universities administered the class surveys to students at the end of the term. The election day exit poll was approximately 50 questions long in its original form, and asked respondents standard questions about their vote in the presidential election (who did the

respondent vote for, why did they vote in this fashion, when did they come to their decision), standard demographic indicators, as well as a longer section asking respondents their opinion about corruption in government. Each university had the option of adding questions about local political issues to the above-stated questions. Each faculty instructor agreed to incorporate the exit poll in their course curricula by the start of the semester, and students at each of the universities were informed of the exit poll at this time. Depending on the particular course at each university, class participation in the exit poll was either voluntary or mandatory, and thus was worth varying degrees of credit toward the students' final course grade. Again, depending on the particular course at each particular university, students had differing degrees of involvement with the exit poll after its administration. That is, in some of the courses students were required to code, analyze, and discuss the information gathered by the exit polls, while others were not.

California State University, Northridge, is a large public university of about 29,000 students. The Northridge students who administered the exit poll were enrolled in Political Science 372: Research Methods, a lecture and laboratory course required of all political science majors. These students designed some questions for the exit poll that were related to a state ballot initiative and included these with the questions relating to corruption. On the day of the exit poll, students were required to work a two hour shift at the poll location for 15% of their final course grade. Students were able to gain extra credit toward their laboratory grade with each additional hour spent at the exit poll location. Students were then required to perform data entry, analyze the data, and incorporate the data into a final research paper. Of the 32 students who took the class survey at the end of the semester, 58.1% were female and 41.9% were male. 54.8% of the students were juniors and 45.2% were seniors. 96.8% of the students were political science majors. The average age of these students was 27.6 years⁶.

Tulane University is a small private university of about 7,200 students. Students at Tulane University who administered the exit poll were part of either an American Political Culture or an Elections in America course. Although the exit poll was not required for the course itself, students in the course were required to enroll for a one-unit service learning credit, in which their participation in the exit poll would determine

their final grade. For a passing grade (D) of this one-unit service learning credit, students were required to work eight hours at the exit poll locations. Students who aspired to a higher grade were required to put in 25 hours of work, including the completion of a literature review, pretesting of the survey instrument, and data entry. Of the 40 students who took the class survey at the end of the semester, 67.5% were female and 32.5% were male; 45.0% were juniors, 37.5% were seniors, and 17.5% were sophomores; 81.6% were political science majors; and the average age of the students was 20.5 years.

The University of Iowa has approximately 27,900 students enrolled, making it almost half of the population size of Iowa City (60,000). Students at the University of Iowa administered the exit poll as part of their Municipal Governments course. Students were required to participate in the exit poll as part of the course, with 10% of their final course grade dependent upon their participation. Of the 24 students who took the class survey at the end of the semester, 58.3% were male and 41.7% were female; 56.5% were juniors, and 43.5% were seniors (with one case missing); 56.5% were political science majors; and the average age of the students was 20.7 years.

Located in Kenosha, Wisconsin (population 85,000), students at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside total about 4,700. Students here administered the exit poll⁷ as part of their Introduction to American Government course, a course necessary to fulfill general education requirements. Students were required to take part in the data collection of exit polls in four hour shifts, with this exercise worth 25% of their final grade. Of the 32 students who took the class survey at the end of the semester, 59.4% were female and 40.6% male; 43.8% were freshman, 37.5% sophomores, 15.6% juniors and 3.1% seniors; 87.5% were in majors other than political science, and the average age of the students was 21.8 years.

In comparing the different political science courses represented in this exit poll, we see that they are quite different. The students at California State University, Northridge, were virtually all upper-class students, with a near totality political science majors (96.8%). In contrast, the students from the University of Wisconsin-Parkside were mostly lower-division students (only 18.7% juniors and seniors), with a majority of the students not political science majors (87.5%). At the University of Iowa, 58.3% of the students taking the exit poll were male, while at Tulane University, 67.5% were

Table 1
Students' Perceptions of Ease/Difficulty in Exit Polling

"On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 indicating greatest ease and 1 indicating greatest difficulty, how easy or difficult were the following?"

	Mean (Standard Deviation)
INTERVIEWING PROCEDURES	7.17 (2.14) F ratio = 3.50*
California State University, Northridge (n = 32)	6.18 (2.36)
Tulane University (n = 39)	8.00 (1.76)
University of Iowa, Iowa City (n = 24)	7.20 (1.77)
University of Wisconsin, Parkside (n = 32)	6.50 (2.33)
TRANSPORTATION TO POLLING SITE	8.40 (2.04) F ratio = 4.12**
California State University, Northridge	8.50 (1.81)
Tulane University	7.63 (2.54)
University of Iowa, Iowa City	9.38 (.92)
University of Wisconsin, Parkside	8.53 (1.85)
CONVINCING INDIVIDUALS TO COMPLETE THE EXIT POLL	5.76 (2.29) F ratio = 6.12***
California State University, Northridge	5.25 (2.50)
Tulane University	6.05 (2.01)
University of Iowa, Iowa City	7.17 (1.63)
University of Wisconsin, Parkside	4.84 (2.33)
LEVEL OF PHYSICAL SAFETY (1 = LEAST SAFE, 10 = MOST SAFE)	8.44 (1.96) F ratio = 5.44**
California State University, Northridge	7.53 (2.53)
Tulane University	8.30 (1.90)
University of Iowa, Iowa City	9.50 (.88)
University of Wisconsin, Parkside	8.72 (1.55)

*significant at $p < .05$

**significant at $p < .01$

***significant at $p < .001$

female (the highest percentage of females overall). A true mix of political science courses was represented. They should offer some interesting information as to whether or not a class exit poll will be more successful in one type of course versus another.

Survey of Students

What did the students think of the exit poll experience itself? The survey asked students about the exit poll, its length and ease of administration as well as transportation and safety issues, to ascertain whether or not these differed by location. We report on these factors first, then move on to the broader question of whether or not the students perceived a benefit in having participated in a class exit poll.

Table 1 shows the students' responses to questions about how easy or difficult it was to administer an exit poll. Three questions asked the students to rate their responses on a scale of 1 to 10, with '1' indicating greatest difficulty

and '10' indicating greatest ease, to the following aspects of exit poll administration: 1) interviewing procedures; 2) transportation to the polling site, and, 3) convincing individuals to complete the exit poll. A fourth question asked students to evaluate the perceived level of safety in administering the exit poll, with '1' indicating least safe, and '10' indicating most safe.

With respect to these four measures, each of the means was greater than 5, which would indicate that the students' impressions were more positive than negative, although there are significant differences within the groups on each measure. For interviewing procedures, a mean score of 7.17 (sd 2.14), indicates that the students found the interviewing procedures relatively easy. However, there is variance between the groups, as the significant F ratio of 3.5 ($p < .05$) illustrates. A modified Bonferroni test contrasts the students at Tulane (mean of 8.00, sd 1.76) with those at California State University, Northridge (mean of 6.18, sd 2.36) and the University of Wisconsin-Parkside (mean 6.50, sd

2.33). The students at Northridge and in Wisconsin seemed to have the most difficulty with the interviewing procedures, although the students in Wisconsin were still able to collect a reasonable sample.

Transportation was not a problem (mean of 8.40, sd 2.04), although the F ratio of 4.12 ($p < .01$) also denotes differences between the groups. The modified Bonferroni test shows a significant difference between the students at Tulane (mean 7.63, sd 2.54) and those at the University of Iowa (mean 9.38, sd .92). It should be noted that this difference is the narrowest between the groups, with the students at the University of Iowa indicating an amazingly high, and uniform, level of ease in transportation to the polling sites.

The most variance came in the measure which asked students to rate how difficult or easy it was to convince individuals to complete the exit poll. This mean of 5.76 (sd 2.29) was the lowest of the measures, and the F ratio of 6.12 ($p < .001$) was most significant indicating that there was variance in perceived levels of difficulty. The students at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside seemed to have the most difficulty in convincing individuals to complete the exit poll (mean 4.84, sd 2.33), followed by the students in California (mean 5.25, sd 2.50). These means were significantly different from the responses of the University of Iowa students (mean 7.17, sd 1.63). Interestingly, despite these perceived differences, the students at both Iowa and Wisconsin had high response rates, while the students at Northridge did not.

Most of the students perceived a high level of physical safety (mean 8.44, sd 1.96), although the F ratio (5.44, $p < .01$) once again indicates significant difference between the groups. Not surprisingly, a lower level of safety was reported by the Northridge students (mean 7.53, sd 2.53) some of whom had to close their polling station due to gang violence. This is in significant contrast to the students at the University of Iowa (mean 9.50, sd .88) whose responses indicated a very high level of perceived safety. Nevertheless, the overall scores suggest that, all things considered, the students felt pretty safe in their exit polling experience.

The ratings given by the students on these measures of the exit polling experience indicate that the students felt pretty safe in administering the exit poll and were able to get transportation to the polling sites easily. The most variation occurred with respect to the difficulty in administering the exit poll, with significant differences experienced by the stu-

Table 2
Overall Response to the Exit Poll Experience

Did you feel an overall sense of benefit from your participation in the exit poll? (N = 126)	yes: 69.8% (88)	no: 30.2% (38)
On a scale of 1–10 with 10 indicating greatest benefit and 1 indicating least benefit, how beneficial was participation in the exit poll in understanding the course objectives? (N = 127)	mean: 6.20	mode: 7
Did participation in the exit poll further your understanding of survey research? (N = 127)	yes: 81.1% (103)	no: 18.9% (24)
Did participation in the exit poll further your interest in political science? (N = 127)	yes: 55.9% (71)	no: 44.1% (56)
Did participation in the exit poll further your interest in the election? (N = 127)	yes: 70.1% (89)	no: 29.9%

dents from the University of Wisconsin and California State University, Northridge. Again, the interesting result here is that while the students at Northridge and Wisconsin reported similar levels of difficulty, the Wisconsin students had a higher response rate. We might then ask if perceived benefits of the experience varied by reported levels of difficulty.

Overall, most of the students did report a sense of benefit from the exit poll experience, with 68.8% (88) reporting an overall sense of benefit, and 30.2% (24) reporting no sense of benefit (see Table 2). When asked on a scale of 1–10, with ‘1’ indicating least benefit and ‘10’ indicating the most benefit, how beneficial the exit poll was in understanding the course objectives, the average score was 6.2, with a median of 7, indicating that for at least half of the students, the exit poll was a beneficial tool in understanding the course objectives. When asked whether or not their participation in the exit poll furthered their understanding of survey research, 81.1% (103) of the students indicated that it did, and 18.9% (24) indicated that it did not. With respect to the exit poll furthering their interest in political science, only 55.9% (71) of the students indicated that their participation in the exit poll furthered their interest in political science, while 44.1% (56) indicated that it did not. Finally, when asked whether or not their participation in the exit poll furthered their interest in the election, 70.1% (89) of the students indicated that their participation in the exit poll did further their interest

in the election, while 29.9% (38) indicated that their participation did not further their interest in the election.

Thus, a majority of the students from the four universities did report a sense of overall benefit from participating in the class exit poll (68.8%), with their participation furthering their understanding of survey research (81.1%) and their interest in the election (70.1%). However, only a slim majority reported that their participation in the class exit poll furthered their interest in political science. Because these students were all enrolled in a political science course, it might seem counterintuitive that this should be the case. However, because some of the students were completing general education requirements, and not necessarily political science majors, we might be interested in comparing the responses of political science majors to those of non-majors to see if their perceptions differed. This comparison is made in Table 3, and shows that of the five questions on the benefits of the exit poll experience, only on the political science question was there a statistically significant difference. That is, in comparison to the political science majors (63.6%, $n = 49$), and the other social science majors (100%, $n = 5$), only 36.6% ($n = 15$) of the non-majors indicated that participation in the exit poll furthered their interest in political science. Although the exit poll experience seemed to be of benefit for the students in terms of their understanding of the class, their understanding of survey research, and their interest in the election, it did not necessarily spur

Table 3
Response to Exit Poll Experience by Major

	Political Science Majors (N = 78)	Other Social Science (N = 6)	Non-Majors (N = 41)
Did you feel an overall sense of benefit from your participation in the exit poll?	Yes: 72.4% (55) No: 27.6 (21) (1 case missing)	Yes: 83.5% (5) No: 16.7 (1)	Yes: 65.0% (26) No: 35.0 (14) (1 case missing)
On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 indicating greatest benefit and 1 indicating least benefit, how beneficial was participation in the exit poll in understanding the course objectives?	Mean: 6.28 Standard Deviation: 2.20	Mean: 5.83 Standard Deviation: 1.83	Mean: 6.12 Standard Deviation: 2.55
Did participation in the exit poll further your understanding of survey research?	Yes: 80.8% (63) No: 19.2 (15)	Yes: 83.3% (5) No: 16.7 (1)	Yes: 82.5% (33) No: 17.5 (7) (1 case missing)
Did participation in the exit poll further your interest in political science?*	Yes: 63.6 % (49) No: 36.4 (28) (1 case missing)	Yes: 100% (5) (1 case missing)	Yes: 36.6% (15) No: 63.4 (26)
Did participation in the exit poll further your interest in the election?	Yes: 76.9% (60) No: 23.1 (18)	Yes: 100% (5) (1 case missing)	Yes: 56.1% (23) No: 43.9 (18)

*Lambda of .204 and chi-square value of 12.028 ($p < .01$)

their interest in political science. We suggest that this may have had something to do with the course in which the exit poll was undertaken.

Table 4 compares students' perceptions of exit poll benefits across the universities. There was no statistically significant difference between the different political science courses, with respect to whether or not the students felt an overall sense of benefit from participating in the exit poll (Chi-Square = 2.19 ($p > .05$); lambda = .000). We also see no statistically significant differences between the courses with respect to whether or not the students felt the exit poll helped them better understand the course objectives (F score of .42, $p < .05$; eta = .10). Students in the different courses were similar in their assessment of whether or not their participation in the exit poll increased their understanding of survey research (lambda = .000), as well whether or not their participation in the exit poll furthered their interest in the presidential election (lambda = .000; Chi-square = 11.44 ($p < .01$)).

There were some significant differences, however, between the universities with respect to the question of whether or not participation in the exit poll increased students' interest in political science. Overall, only 54.3% (70) of the total sample indicated that their participation in the exit poll furthered their interest in political science. Looking at

the individual courses, we see a variety of differences. Only 25% (8) of the students at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside (Introduction to American Government) indicated that their participation furthered their interest in political science, compared to 79.2% (19) of those students at the University of Iowa (Municipal Governments). At California State University Northridge (Research Methods), and Tulane University (American Political Culture/Elections in America), the percentages were 62.5% (20), and 60.5% (23), respectively. A lambda value of .29, and chi-square value of 18.52 ($p < .001$), confirms the significant differences between the courses. This difference is most likely attributable to the high percentage on non-majors (87.5%) in the Introduction to American Government course at the University of Wisconsin.

To Survey or not to Survey . . .

The impetus for this study came about because of the varying degrees of success that the students of these courses had in administering their class exit poll. Students at California State University, Northridge, had poor results and low completion rates. Students at Northridge and Wisconsin reported more difficulty with the interviewing procedures, and in convincing individuals to complete the

exit polls than at the other locations. Additionally, students at Northridge felt less safe than students at the other universities in administering the exit polls. In contrast, students at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, and Tulane University in New Orleans were quite successful in achieving a high number of completed exit polls. Notably, the students in Iowa had the highest level of perceived safety, and found the least difficulty in interviewing procedures and convincing people to complete the exit polls. Although it is not the purpose of this work to explain why the exit poll was more successful in some places than in others, and whether or not geographic area had anything to do with level of success, it is interesting to see that students perceived a benefit from the experience, even if the exit poll was not objectively successful (i.e. high completion rates).

Ideally, a study of the benefits of a class exit poll with respect to the educational experience of the student would have employed a pre/post test design. Students' interest in political science and in the presidential election would have been assessed before and after the exit poll experience to evaluate any changes in interest. This was not done here. Nevertheless, the results of our survey indicate that benefits of this project in excess of increased course understanding, were felt by a majority of the students. A majority of

Table 4
Comparison of Exit Poll Response Across Four Universities

	California State University, Northridge (N = 32)	Tulane University (N = 39)	University of Iowa, Iowa City (N = 24)	University of Wisconsin–Parkside (N = 32)
Did you feel an overall sense of benefit from your participation in the exit poll?	Yes: 67.7% (21) (1 case missing)	yes: 71.8% (28) (1 case missing)	yes: 79.2% (19)	yes: 61.3%(19) (1 case missing)
On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 indicating greatest benefit and 1 indicating least benefit, how beneficial was participation in the exit poll in understanding the course objectives?	mean: 6.41 s.d. 2.21	mean: 6.03 s.d.: 2.61	mean: 5.88 s.d.: 1.77	mean: 6.44 s.d.: 2.35
Did participation in the exit poll further your understanding of survey research?	yes: 80.6% (25) (1 case missing)	yes: 77.5% (31)	yes: 83.3% (20)	yes: 83.9% (26) (1 case missing)
Did participation in the exit poll further your interest in political science?	yes: 62.5% (20)	yes: 60.5% (23) (2 cases missing)	yes: 79.2% (19)	yes: 25.0% (8)
Did participation in the exit poll further your interest in the election	yes: 80.6% (25) (1 case missing)	yes: 66.7% (26) (1 case missing)?	yes: 87.5% (21)	yes: 50.0% (16)

the students not only indicated that they understood the course material better, but also understood survey research better, had more of an interest in political science, and had more of an interest in the presidential election. Although we cannot track levels of change in interest in survey research, political science, or the election, due to the students' exit poll experience, we can answer the question of 'to poll or not to poll' in the affirmative, although with some qualifications.

The most interesting difference between the universities, and particular courses, is seen in a comparison between California State University, Northridge (Research Methods) and the University of Wisconsin-Parkside (Introduction to American Government). At both universities, the students reported similar levels of difficulty in convincing individuals to complete the exit poll, and with interviewing procedures. The students also felt less safe in Northridge. However, the perceived benefit of

the exit poll was felt by more students at Northridge compared to the students in Wisconsin, even given these problems. This is especially the case with respect to the 'broader benefit' questions; that is, did the participation in the exit poll further one's interest in political science and in the election? We suspect these differences have much to do with the courses, and the composition of the students in these courses. Whereas the research methods course was over 90% political science majors, 87.5% of the students in Introduction to American Politics course were non-majors. Moreover, students in the research methods course were involved in more than administering interviews as they analyzed and integrated the collected data into their final papers. We suggest here that while students in all types of political science courses will receive some benefit from having participated in such a project, students in the major will report the most far reaching benefits, especially if it is tied in to

other aspects of the course, such as a final paper.

I suggest that such a class exit poll project is perhaps more appropriate for upper division students in the major. These students will likely have enough background information to understand election-day exit polls (perhaps the events of November 2000 have been discussed in class), and see the experience as part of the election-day landscape. By integrating the poll into other aspects of the class, such as a final paper, students can gain more from the experience. At the least, the experience creates a shared experience that many students will remember past the semester's end. From my own experience, my former research methods students at Northridge still talk about what a great experience the exit poll was, even though the data collection was unsuccessful. Their enthusiasm has carried over into other courses, and has benefited not only them, but others who now teach these enthusiastic students.

Notes

1. This was originally presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, and the 2002 Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Political Science Association. I would like to thank Douglas Rose

(Tulane), David P. Redlawsk (University of Iowa), Fred M. Monardi (University of Wisconsin-Parkside), and James A. McCann (Purdue University) for administering the student surveys in their political science courses, as well as the

PS anonymous reviewers for their comments.

2. "Exit Polls, Stage Left," *Christian Science Monitor*, Editorial, 2000, 93(11):10.

3. See Alan McBride, "Teaching Research Methods Using Appropriate Technology," *PS*:

Political Science and Politics 27(1994): 553–557.

4. See Nick Moon and Robin McGregor, “Exit polls—Developing a Technique,” *Journal of the Market Research Society* 34(1992): 257–269.

5. Douglas Rose at Tulane suggests that a similar skip pattern at all of the polling sites will not result in a higher percentage of voters from the higher turnout precincts. Email correspondence, 3/5/02.

6. This average is affected by the demo-

graphic information of one of the students, a 79 year old!

7. The exit poll was actually administered in Kenosha County (population 120,000) in order to have a more even distribution of Republicans and Democrats in the sample.

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