

POSC 308/408: The American Presidency

Fall, 2011 Syllabus as of August 24, 2011

Professors Justin Buchler and Joseph White

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Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:30 – 1:45 pm

Mandel Center 105

Faculty Contact Information

Professor Buchler: Mather House 9, 368-2646, office hours 2-3 MW and whenever the door is open

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Description

This course will study the most puzzling institution in American government. It is puzzling first because there is a mismatch between the role that both the public and presidents appear to expect presidents to play in American government, and the quite limited powers that were established by the constitutional design. The president's role in government far exceeds what could be expected from reading the constitution or *The Federalist Papers*. Why? But the president is also blamed for events over which he (so far it has been a he) has little control. Why? In short, there is a *puzzle of presidential power*. What are its sources, what are its extent and limits, and to what extent can presidents expand or (if unlucky and unskillful) reduce their influence?

The second puzzle involves what we mean by “the presidency.” There are at least three levels. One is the presidency as an institution, a bundle of powers and responsibilities, within a system of “separated institutions sharing powers.” One is the presidency as a set of organizations, sometimes called the “presidential branch” of government. The presidential branch is very different from the executive branch of government. It includes bureaucracies, such as the Office of Management and Budget and the National Security Council, that work directly for the president and, in theory, to help whoever holds the office manage relationships with Congress, the federal agencies, the public, and other forces that influence what government does. The third level of the presidency is the individuals who hold the office. Their psychology and skills have major effects on how the presidency influences American government at any point in time. Hence we cannot understand the presidency without thinking about the set of powers, the organizations, and the person – but those are also quite different topics.

Class Structure

The course will meet two times a week. It will be a very unusual course, for the political science department, because it will be team-taught. Professor Buchler will take the lead on topics in which he is especially expert, such as elections. Professor White will take the lead on topics that are central to his work, such as budgeting and the relationship between the president or presidential branch and the wider executive branch. And both of us will contribute on other topics.

The course will also mix lecture and discussion formats. Lectures will focus on particular aspects of the presidency on which we wish to present specific arguments. In other cases, where readings investigate a topic at some depth, the class will be conducted more as a seminar to investigate the readings. That will especially be the case as we discuss some highly influential books or articles about the presidency, which make arguments that have been central to subsequent analysis by political scientists and journalists.

Assignments and Grading

In addition to the midterm and final, students will apply what they are learning about the presidency and its challenges to a case study of one particular decision. They can choose either a decision made by President Bill Clinton or a decision made by President George W. Bush.

Greenstein's *The Presidential Difference* discusses both presidencies, and students may look to that text for broad guidance on the major policy decisions of each president. However, the papers themselves will require additional research. Students should consider resources such as *Congressional Quarterly* and *National Journal* archives (both of which are available as databases on the Kelvin Smith Library website) as well as academic sources to provide historical context. The paper should have three sections: (1) a description of the substantive and political challenge and choice facing the president in question; (2) a summary of what he did, and (3) an argument about whether or not his choices were appropriate, and why. Your analysis in the final section must be based centrally on concepts from course readings. The paper should be about 2500 words (10 pages) long. However, grades will depend on the quality of the analysis rather than the length. Students registered for POSC 408 will be required to write a paper that analyzes in greater depth; it should be 3500 to 4000 words. The latter students should consult with the instructors to work out expectations for their topic and paper.

In the course of your analysis, feel free to consider how a policy decision affected the president's reelection prospects, the legislative process, or the executive branch. You

should express some of the relative merits or demerits of alternative courses of action. However, papers should focus on the strategic merits of the decision rather than the normative implications of the decision.

We encourage you to meet with one or both of us to discuss what presidential decision you will study. A short statement of the decision (e.g. what the issue was, what the decision was, and when it was made) will be due in class no later than October 19.

In addition to the paper, the course will also have midterm and final exams, both on a take-home basis. A portion of the grade will also be based on classroom participation, which includes being prepared to answer questions if we ask you during class, and the discussion questions you will be submitting before some class sessions (as described below). The grading formula for both POSC 308 and POSC 408 will be:

Participation: 10%

Midterm: 25%

Paper: 30%

Final Exam: 35%.

Classroom procedures

Attendance is mandatory. Each student shall be permitted to miss four sessions. Each absence beyond four will result in a two percentage point deduction from the student's overall course grade. Exceptions may be made, but only under extraordinary circumstances.

We also request that students show up on time for class. Students may show up late once, but each late attendance beyond that will result in a one percentage point deduction from the overall course grade. If you have an issue due to having an immediately preceding class far across campus, you should inform us and we will consult with the instructor of the other class to see if any adjustment can be worked out – such as that professor understanding that you need to depart at 12:20 and no later.

The course will contain a mix of lecture and seminar components. Either on the syllabus or in advance, we will inform you if a class is scheduled to be a formal seminar. For these classes the procedure will be as follows. Each student will attend the session with a discussion question or comment raised by the readings. The class will then respond to the question or comment until the discussion reaches an obvious end-point. Then, we will move on to the next student's question or comment, and the process will repeat until

each student has had the opportunity to raise a question or comment.

Throughout the course, we will address controversial topics about which many people have strong feelings. However, our objective is to cover the topics from a dispassionate perspective, and we ask that students approach the material with intellectual curiosity rather than with the intention of expressing opinions about whether presidential decisions are right or wrong from a moral, ethical or ideological perspective. We ourselves find it rather easy to be critical of any president; but it is a very tough job and easier to critique than to do!

We encourage students to bring laptops to class with the provision that any student with a laptop out may be instructed, at any time, to follow up on a point raised in class by looking up important facts that neither of the professors can recall immediately. So, only bring a laptop if you are prepared to use it to facilitate class activities rather than as a distraction. Cell phones, blackberries, iphones and other unnamed gizmos, though, may not be used, and should be turned off before class begins.

Schedule of Discussions, Readings, and Assignments

*Some of these readings are taken from edited volumes. "A&P" is Joel D. Aberbach and Mark A. Peterson eds., *The Executive Branch* (2005); "Obama" is James A. Thurber ed., *Obama in Office* (2011); "Rivals" is Thurber ed., *Rivals for Power* (2009).*

The following books are assigned in their entirety, and available from the university bookstore:

Fred Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Barack Obama*, 3rd ed.

Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*.

Readings which are available directly online or from the university library will be listed with those links or the journal title and issue. Readings that are copies of chapters from books will be available from the library e-reserves. Some other readings will be made available on the class blackboard site. If not otherwise specified, a reading should be found on the e-reserves.

August 29

First class meeting. Discussion of goals of the course and of what the students expect from a president. Who are the good or “great” presidents? Why? What makes a “failed presidency”? What do you expect a president to do?

Part I: The President and Presidency in a Separated System

August 31 System Perspectives (1)

Lecture by Professor White on the Puzzle of Presidential Power.

Hugh Hecla, “Introduction: The Presidential Illusion” 17 pp.

Terry M. Moe, “The Politicized Presidency,” Chapter 9 in John E. Chubb and Paul E. Peterson eds., *The New Direction in American Politics* (1985), pp. 235-272.

September 5 No class: Labor Day Holiday

September 7 System Perspectives (2)

Scott C. James, “The Evolution of the Presidency: Between the Promise and the Fear” (pp 3-40 of A&P)

Charles O. Jones, “Perspectives on the Presidency,” Chapter 1 of Jones, 2nd ed (2005), pp. 1-34.

September 12 Presidents (1)

Read: Greenstein

NOTE: The 9/12 and 9/14 sessions will be seminar sessions. Students should attend these sessions with discussion questions or comments prepared.

September 14 Presidents (2)

Discussion of Greenstein continues

Continuation of seminar

September 19 Constitutional Powers

James Pfiffner, “The Presidency: Origins and Powers.” Pp. 1-17 in Pfiffner, *The Modern Presidency* 6th ed. (2011).

The Constitution of the United States Articles I and II and the 12th, 14th, 15th, 19th, 20th, 22nd, 24th, 25th, and 26th amendments. Available with useful explanation at

http://www.senate.gov/civics/constitution_item/constitution.htm#a1

The Federalist Papers numbers 69 and 70, downloadable from

<http://www.law.ou.edu/hist/federalist/>

Part II: Presidents and the Public

September 21 Communication in One Direction

Lawrence R. Jacobs, "Communicating from the White House: Presidential Narrowcasting and the National Interest" (A&P)

Scott Lilly, "Communication is Destiny" (Obama)

September 26 Choosing the President: The Nomination Process

Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich and David W. Rohde, Chapter 1 from *Change and Continuity in the 2008 and 2010 Elections*, pp. 14-37.

Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel and John Zaller, "Political Parties in Rough Weather," *The Forum* 2008.

John Aldrich, "The Invisible Primary and Its Effects on the Democratic Choice." *PS: Political Science and Politics* January 2009.

Audrey A. Haynes and Brian Pitts, "Making and Impression: New Media in the 2008 Presidential Nomination Campaigns." *PS: Political Science and Politics* January 2009.

September 28 Nominations Continued

NOTE: A portion of the 9/28 session will be seminar-based, so students should attend that session with questions or comments prepared.

October 3 Choosing the President: The General Election

Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich and David W. Rohde, Chapters 2 and 3 from *Change and Continuity in the 2008 and 2010 Elections*, pp. 38-79.

Larry M. Bartels and John Zaller, "Presidential Vote Models: A Recount." *PS: Political Science and Politics* March 2001.

Alan I. Abramowitz, "Forecasting the 2008 Presidential Election with the Time-for-Change Model," *PS: Political Science and Politics* October 2008.

Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, "Blind Retrospection: Electoral Responses to Drought, Flu and Shark Attacks." Paper presented at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.

October 5 General Election Continued

NOTE: A portion of the 10/5 session will be seminar-based, so students should attend that session with questions or comments prepared.

October 10 What the Choice Means

Robert A. Dahl, "Myth of the Presidential Mandate," *Political Science Quarterly* 1990, pp. 355-372;

Gene Healy, "The Cult of the Presidency," *Reason*, June 2008, pp. 20-28.

Take-Home Exam Distributed

October 12: TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE

Part III: Presidents in Cooperation and Conflict

October 17 President as Legislator (1)

Mark J. Oleszek and Walter J. Oleszek, "Congress and the President: 'Yes We Can!' or 'Can We?'" *Rivals* pp. 251-284

Joseph White ms. on prospects for President George W. Bush's domestic agenda.

October 19 President as Legislator, 2009-10

Jonathan Cohn (2010), "How They Did It". *The New Republic* (June 10): 14-25

Jacob Hacker (2010), "The Road to Somewhere: Why Health Reform Happened". *Perspectives on Politics* 8(3): 861-876.

[Students Must Choose Topics for Their Paper By Today](#)

October 26 A Classic Analysis – Persuasion, Bargaining, Trading

Read: Neustadt

NOTE: The 10/26 and 10/31 sessions will be seminar sessions. Students should attend these sessions with discussion questions or comments prepared

October 31 Continued Discussion of Neustadt

Continuation of seminar

November 2 Conditions for Legislative Success and Failure

Read: Barbara Sinclair, "Hostile Partners: The President, Congress, and Lawmaking in the Partisan 1990s." *Polarized Politics* pp. 134-153.

Richard Fleischer and Jon R. Bond, "Partisanship and the President's Quest for Votes on the Floor of Congress." *Polarized Politics* pp. 154-185.

November 7 The role of presidential popularity and the rally effect

Read: Richard A. Brody, *Assessing the President*, Chapters 1, 3 and 5.

November 9 Executive Powers: Appointments and Orders

Read: David E. Lewis, "Revisiting the Administrative Presidency: Policy, Patronage, and Agency Competence (24 pp.); Kenneth R. Mayer, "Executive Orders," Chapter 7 in Joseph M. Bessette and Jeffrey K. Tulis eds., *The Constitutional Presidency* 5th ed. (2009), pp. 149-172 (fn 324-333).

November 14 Executive Powers – Directing Agency Decisions

Read: Robert V. Percival, "Who's in Charge? Does the President Have Directive Authority Over Agency Regulatory Decisions?" *Fordham Law Review* Vol. 79 (2011) pp. 2487-2540.

http://www.fordhamlawreview.org/assets/pdfs/Vol_79/Percival_May.pdf

Executive Order 13563, January 18, 2011 (3pp.)

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-01-21/pdf/2011-1385.pdf>

NOTE: The 11/14 class will be a seminar session. Students should attend this class with discussion questions or comments prepared

November 16 Executive Power: The special case of foreign policy?

Louis Fisher, "The President, Congress, Military Tribunals, and Guantanamo," Chapter 14 in *Rivals*, pp. 325-350.

Richard M. Pious, "Obama's Use of Prerogative Powers in the War on Terrorism," Chapter 16 in *Obama*, pp. 255-68.

November 21 The Politics of Divided Government

Read: David R. Mayhew, *Divided We Govern*, Chapters 1, 4, 5, 6.

November 23 Optional Class due to Thanksgiving Holiday

November 28 The President and the Executive Office

Matthew J. Dickinson, "The Executive Office of the President: The Paradox of Politicization," pp. 135-173 in A&P; James Pfiffner, "Decision-Making in the Obama White House," *Obama* pp. 244-262.

NOTE: The 11/28 class will be a seminar session. Students should attend this class with discussion questions or comments prepared

November 30 The President and Advice

James Pfiffner, "Presidential Leadership and Advice About Going to War," pp. 135-157 in Terry L. Price and J. Thomas Wren eds., *The Values of Presidential Leadership*, 2007;

George E. Reedy, "The Pressure Cooker," chapter 7 in Reedy, *The Twilight of the Presidency* (1970) pp 85-98.

December 5 Presidents, the Bureaucracy, and Congress: The Budget

Joseph White, "The President's Budget vs. Congressional Budgeting: Institutionalizing the Adversarial Presidency?" *Rivals* chapter 10, pp. 229-250.

December 7 Presidents, the Bureaucracy, and Congress: The Budget (2)

Joseph White, "From Ambition to Desperation on the Budget," *Obama* Chapter 11, pp. 183-198

Strategic Choices Paper Due December 9

Papers will be available, graded, by 5 pm on December 14.

The final exam time slot is December 20 at 8:30 a.m. We prefer to do a take-home exam, and the class will discuss the best time for the exam. The exam will be distributed at the time chosen, and will be due 24 hours later.