

POSC 308/408: The American Presidency

Fall 2016 Syllabus

Draft as of August 2, 2016

Professor Joseph White

MWF 9:30 – 10:20

Room TBD

Mather House 113. Office Hours 10:30 – Noon MW

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Our Topic

This course will study the most puzzling institution in American government.

The first puzzle involves defining the institution: the *puzzle of presidents and the presidency*. At any time there is only one president, and for some the presidency means the individuals who hold the office. So we speak of the Bush 43 Presidency, or the Obama Presidency, or Reagan Presidency. Yet the presidency is also a bundle of powers and responsibilities, within a system of “separated institutions sharing powers.” These powers and responsibilities are not simply exercised by an individual called the president, but by a set of organizations, sometimes called the “presidential 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 to help him or her manage relationships with Congress, the federal agencies, the public, and other forces that influence what government does. 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.

The second puzzle involves what the presidency (whatever that means) can do and is expected to do: the *puzzle of presidential power*. Many observers argue 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*. The president is also blamed for events over which he (so far it has been a he) has little control. What, then, are the sources, forms, and limits of presidential power, and how do presidents expand or (if unlucky and unskillful) reduce their influence?

Third is the *puzzle of presidential "performance."* Why does public opinion or the "judgment of history" favor some presidents and not others? Are some presidents "great" or is greatness thrust upon them by circumstances? To put this another way, to what extent do presidents control how well they do, or do the conditions of the time dominate presidential performance? How can we tell?

We will explore these questions while recognizing that, as is usual in the study of politics and government, we can only gain knowledge and wisdom, not absolute truth. One reason is, the objects we study change. The presidency – in its various forms – changes with its inhabitants and with its environment.

The learning objectives of this course therefore are for students to better understand:

- * The different dimensions of the presidency;
- * The challenges and opportunities faced by the president in office at any given time; and
- * How the presidency fits into the broader structure of U.S. government and politics.

Put another way, I'd be thrilled if students emerged from the class able to look at a presidency and understand in what dimensions it is succeeding or failing; to what extent the success or failure is due to the president's own choices and if so to which choices; and to what extent any president under the conditions of the time might hope to do better.

Class Procedures and Assignments

Reading and Participation in Discussion

We will proceed, mainly, by reading analyses and discussing them. I will also add lectures either to introduce a broad topic or if I have a well-developed view that differs somewhat from the readings. The class discussion and lectures will be part of the material students are expected to be able to use for the written assignments, so as usual attending class should help students earn better grades than if they do not attend. Students are expected (and welcome, and urged!) to participate and share their ideas and reactions to the ideas and evidence that the reading or I present. You are asked to let me know in advance if you will not be able to attend, and I understand that there are *occasional* conflicts.

Any book or article has something to say. Maybe lots of different things. These can be viewed as *propositions*, such as "presidential power is the power to persuade," or, "the growth of the White House staff since FDR has been both a boon and a bane to

presidents." Your understanding of the presidency will also consist of propositions, and the thinking behind those statements. What, for example, does it mean to say "presidential power is the power to persuade?" Aren't there other forms of power? Who do presidents need to persuade, about what, and why would anyone listen? Or, how could having more staff be a "bane" – isn't that sort of like having more troops? What general would not want more troops?

In early classes, I will identify propositions from each reading. Beginning fourth week of class, on most days I will ask one or two students to prepare two propositions and start discussion about them. I expect to ask each student to do that twice.

Participation, including the discussion propositions, will count for 10% of the grade in both POSC 308 and POSC 408. I understand that some people are less outgoing than others, so particularly quiet students will not get a lower grade as a result. However, students who have a lot to say, so long as it has some connection to the class material, can benefit from that. Participation would only lower the overall grade if a student misses more than 8 classes without approved explanation, does not prepare propositions, or disrupts the class. Good participation could raise the final grade.

Writing Assignments.

The written assignments for this class will consist of three moderate-length essays about course material and a final essay, in lieu of a final exam, about what should be expected from the Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton presidency, and why.

The essays will be designed to challenge students to reflect on the class material and integrate it into understandings of the modern presidency. The first three will be due on September 26, October 21, and November 21. Each essay should be no fewer than 1800 words.

The final essay will be in lieu of a final exam. You are encouraged to do some research of your own about the winning candidate, in order to form your judgments about logical questions raised by the course material. Your final essays will be due by Noon on December 19. They should be no less than 2500 words long.

Extra Assignment for POSC 408 students

The regulations of the College of Arts and Sciences require that, when a class is offered at both 300- and 400-levels, the 400-level version require some extra work. POSC 408 students will therefore be required to write one further paper. The date and topic will be worked out in consultation with the students. It is highly likely to involve a report on either the George W. Bush or William J. Clinton presidency.

Grades Will Be Calculated as Follows

For POSC 308, each of the first three essays will be worth 20% of the grade. The final essay will be worth 30% of the grade. Participation will count for 10% of the grade.

For POSC 408, each of the first three essays and the extra assignment will count for 15% of the grade. The final essay will count for 30% of the grade, and participation for 10%.

Classroom Procedures and Academic Integrity

I prefer that students arrive on time. I understand that this is sometimes difficult, particularly if you have a class immediately previous on the other side of campus. If that is your situation, please let me know (and tell me which class it is). I will note lateness in my attendance records, and systematic lateness, without a good excuse, will be noted as part of the participation grade.

I expect students' work to be their own. Plagiarism in any form is punishable by a failing grade on the assignment in question and further penalty on the overall grade; and I may initiate university disciplinary proceedings.

I expect students to submit the essays on time. This is especially important because we will discuss them on the days on which they are due, which means that if you do not submit the essay in time I will expect you to skip the class. I expect to reduce grades by half a grade for each day that an assignment is late. I will make exceptions if given a good (and documented) reason.

Cellphones and other electronic devices, other than laptops, should not be used in class. I hope discussion will be courteous and all contributions will be respected by all of us.

Readings other than the books listed below will be available on the course blackboard site. In some cases I will print and distribute them.

Books to Purchase or Otherwise Legally Obtain

George C. Edwards III, *The Strategic President: Persuasion & Opportunity in Presidential Leadership*. Princeton University Press, 2009.

Barton Gellman, *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency*. Penguin Books, 2009.

Schedule of Discussions, Readings, and Assignments

Aug 29 Introduction to class and each other.
Discussion: how much will the current election matter to the world and your lives?

Part I: Introduction and Selecting the President

Aug 31 James P. Pfiffner, "President: Governing." From *The Oxford Companion to American Politics*. 11 pp.

Pfiffner, "The Presidency: Origins and Powers." Chapter 1 in *The Modern Presidency 6th ed.* (Wadsworth/Cengage, 2011), pp. 1-17.

Sept 2 **No Class**, as I must attend the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting. I do suggest that students begin the reading for Sept 7 before Sept 6.

Sept 5 **No Class**, Labor Day

Sept 7 David Remnick, "Going the Distance: On and off the road with Barack Obama." *The New Yorker*, 1/27/14.

Ryan Lizza, "The Obama Memos: The making of a post-post-partisan Presidency." *The New Yorker*, 1/30/12.

Discussion of what these articles suggest about the challenges faced by Obama

Sept 9 Joseph White, "Understanding Elections, Especially Presidential Elections." Unpublished manuscript, 47 pp.

- Sept 12:** Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels, "Blind Retrospection: Why Shark Attacks Are Bad for Democracy," Vanderbilt University Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions Working Paper 5-2013.
Robert A. Dahl, "Myth of the Presidential Mandate," *Political Science Quarterly* 1990, pp. 355-372.
- Sept 14** Excerpts from Stephen Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 2nd ed. Preface, Chapter 1, pp. ix-xiii, 1-26.
- Sept 16** Gene Healy, "The Cult of the Presidency," *Reason*, June 2008
Sam Allis, "Losing a quest for the top, finding a new freedom." *Boston Globe*, February 18, 2009.
- Sept 19** Scott C. James, "The Evolution of the Presidency: Between the Promise and the Fear," Chapter 3 in Joel D. Aberbach and Mark A. Peterson eds., *The Executive Branch* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 3-40.
- Sept 21** Charles O. Jones, "Perspectives on the Presidency," from Jones, *The Presidency in a Separated System* 2nd ed. (Brookings, 2005), pp. 1-34.
- Sept 23** Excerpts from Stephen Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 2nd ed. Chapter 6, pp. 167-194.
First Essay Assignment will be distributed at end of class

First Essay Assignment Due by e-mail at 9:00 a.m. on Sept 26

- Sept 26** Discussion of first essays

Part II: Presidents and the Executive Branch, or, The Executive Power

- Sept 28** Andrew Rudalevige, "The President and Unilateral Power: A Taxonomy." Chapter 17 in Michael Nelson ed., *The Presidency and the Political System* 10th ed. (CQ Press 2014), pp. 473-499.
- Sept 30** David E. Lewis, excerpts from *The Politics of Presidential Appointments* (Princeton, 2008). Chapters 1-2, pp. 1-50, 221-236.

- Oct 3** Robert V. Percival, "Who's in Charge? Does the President Have Directive Authority over Agency Regulatory Decisions?" *Fordham Law Review* 79 (2011), pp. 2487 – 2540)
- Oct 5** Elena Kagan, "Presidential Administration," *Harvard Law Review* 114 (2000-2001). Introduction, Part I, and Part II, pp. 2246 – 2281.
- Oct 7** Further discussion of Percival and Kagan articles.
- Oct 10** David E. Lewis, "Learning the Lessons of Politicization," Chapter 8 of *The Politics of Presidential Appointments*, pp. 201-219, 263-264. Motoko Rich, "'No Child' Law Whittled Down by White House," *New York Times* 7/6/12; Martha Derthick and Andy Rotherham, "Obama's NCLB Waivers: Are they necessary or illegal?" *Education Next* 12(2), Spring 2012.
- Oct 12** **No class, Professor White must observe Yom Kippur**
- Oct 14** 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).
Gregory Korte, "Obama issues 'executive orders by another name,'" *USA Today*, December 17, 2014; "Obama's executive orders you never hear about," *USA Today*, April 11, 2016.
- Oct 17** James Pfiffner, "The President and National Security," Chapter 6 in *The Modern Presidency* 6th ed., 186-229.
Richard M. Pious, "Obama's Use of Prerogative Powers in the War on Terrorism," Chapter 16 James A. Thurber ed., *Obama in Office*. (Paradigm Publishers, 2011) pp. 255-68.
- Oct 19** Dan De Luce, "Hagel: The White House Tried to 'Destroy' Me." *New York Times*, December 18, 2015.
Connie Bruck, "Why Obama Has Failed to Close Guantanamo," *The New Yorker*, August 1, 2016.
- Oct 21** *Second take-home essay is due in class in hardcopy, or by 9:00 a.m. by e-mail. We will discuss them in class.*

Oct 24 No Class, Fall Break

Part III: Leading Beyond the Executive Branch: Persuasion and Maneuver

Oct 26 Andrew Rudalevige, "The Executive Branch and the Legislative Process," Chapter 13 in Aberbach and Peterson eds., *The Executive Branch*, pp. 419-451.

Oct 28 Richard Neustadt, excerpts from *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. (The Free Press, 1990). Chapters 1 and 3, pp. 3-9, 29-48 and "Preface to the 1990 edition," pp. ix – xix. In that order!

Oct 31 Edwards, *The Strategic President*, Preface and Chapter 2 1-2, pp. ix – 60, 200-212.

Nov 2 Edwards, *The Strategic President*, Chapter 3, pp. 61-109, 213-230;

Nov 4 Edwards, *The Strategic President*, Chapters 4-5 on "Leading Congress," pp. 110-187, 230-244.

Nov 7 Joseph White, "Applying What We Know About Presidents: The Case of George W. Bush, as of March, 2001." Ms.

Nov 8 Voluntary Activity: Political Science Department Election Returns Watch Party

Nov 9 **What the Heck Just Happened? Debriefing the Election**

Nov 11 Edwards, *The Strategic President*, Chapter 6, pp. 188-200, 244-47.

Nov 14 Duane Oldfield and Aaron Wildavsky, "Reconsidering the Two Presidencies," *Society*, July/August 1989, pp. 54-59.
John B. Gilmour, "Political Theater or Bargaining Failure: Why Presidents Veto." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 41(3), Sept. 2011, pp. 471-487.

- Nov 16** Joseph White, "The President's Budget vs. Congressional Budgeting: Institutionalizing the Adversarial Presidency?" Chapter 10 in James A. Thurber ed., *Rivals for Power* 4th ed., pp. 229-250.
- Nov 18** Joseph White, "Presidents, Congress, and Budget Decisions." Chapter 9 in James A. Thurber ed., *Rivals for Power* 5th ed., pp. 179-200.
Third essay topic will be handed out at end of class
- Nov 21** Third take-home essay is due by e-mail by 11 a.m. We will discuss them in class.
- Nov 23** **No Class, Day Before Thanksgiving**
(Voluntary discussion section may occur)
- Nov 25** **No Class, Day After Thanksgiving**

Part IV: Power and Advice Inside the White House

- Nov 28:** Gellman, *Angler*, Chapters 1-7, pp. 1-194 (plus notes)
- Nov 30:** Gellman, *Angler*, Chapters 8-11, 195-298 (plus notes)
- Dec 2** Gellman, *Angler*, Chapters 21-14, pp. 299-395 (plus notes)
- Dec 5** Richard Neustadt, Chapters 11-12 of *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*: (on Carter and Reagan), pp. 230-294.
- Dec 7** James P. Pfiffner, "Organizing the Twenty-First Century White House," Chapter 4 in Thurber ed., *Rivals for Power*, pp. 63-86.
- Dec 9** David B. Cohen, Karen M. Hult and Charles E. Walcott, "The Chicago Clan: The Chiefs of Staff in the Obama White House," *Social Science Quarterly* 93(5), Dec 2012, 1101-1126.
Peter A. Baker and Mark Mazetti, "Brennan Draws on Bond With Obama in Backing CIA." *New York Times*, 12/14/14.

**Final Essay Due By E-mail or Hardcopy to Professor White by Noon on
December 19.**