

POSC 308/408: The American Presidency

Spring 2020 Syllabus as of January 3, 2020

Professor Joseph White

Monday/Wednesday 3:20 – 4:35

Office Hours 10:00 – 11:30 Mon/Wed

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Our Topic

This course begins with three puzzles.

The first two should have been major themes in any other year. One is 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 43¹ 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 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?

¹ This refers to the Bush who was the 43rd President, so George W. Bush, as opposed to Bush 41, George Herbert Walker Bush.

The third puzzle is *how to teach a course about the presidency when the president is Donald J. Trump*. President Trump, by many standards, behaves in unusual ways. The most obvious consequence is that topics that might not seem necessary to cover most of the time probably should be covered now – most evidently, impeachment. It also becomes natural to doubt what previous scholarship about the presidency can tell us about this particular situation. My answer is that scholarship about the first two puzzles tells us a lot, but that the current incumbent's behavior should cause us to think about aspects of the presidency that do not usually get as much attention – such as the president's role as a symbolic leader for the nation or parts of the nation. His presidency especially illustrates questions about presidential character and personality, topics on which there is an extensive but not very satisfying literature. His presidency further highlights *questions about the extent to which politics makes presidencies or presidents make politics*.

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. Students also should be aware that this course is only an introduction to the topic and we cannot possibly cover any of the subtopics fully.

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;
- * How the presidency fits into the broader structure of U.S. government and politics; and
- * What these factors tell us about the presidency of Donald J. Trump and how he may change the presidency.

Class Procedures and Assignments

Reading and Participation in Discussion

We will proceed, mainly, by reading analyses and a few stories (accounts of events) and discussing them. I will do formal 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 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.

Discussion is important because it helps students think. We can all – yes, all - learn from hearing other peoples' questions. Learning is less ephemeral if people work their way to knowledge rather than having it thrown at them by someone at the front of a room. On the other hand, discussion is likely to cover fewer points about a reading than a lecture could highlight. So there will be a tension between me wanting to encourage discussion and wanting to get-on-with-it. Please help by contributing and moving discussion along! I hope discussion will be courteous and all contributions will be respected by all of us.

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?

Most readings will make fairly explicit propositions about how some aspect of the presidency works. Others will be stories that can be used to illustrate either propositions made in other readings or in class, or propositions you infer from that reading. In early classes, I will give examples of such propositions. Beginning fourth week of class, on most days I will ask a few students to prepare two propositions (made or illustrated) and submit them to me in advance, by e-mail, by Noon. I will then select propositions and ask the student or students who submitted them to start the class discussion by presenting them. I expect to ask each student to submit propositions 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 5 classes without approved explanation, does not prepare propositions, or disrupts the class. Good participation could raise the final grade.

Writing Assignments.

The main written assignments for this class will consist of three essays about course material and a review of one book about a recent president or presidency.

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 two should include a minimum of 1600 words of analysis. The third, which will be in lieu of a final exam, should be no less than 2000 words.

The book should be about one of the following presidents: Carter, Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. Some books cover an entire presidency, but I will accept books that cover only some significant aspect of or period of time during that presidency. I list possible choices in the appendix, but you can submit others to me for approval. The book review should be no less than 2000 words.

Students will also be expected to select one news article and write a brief statement (e.g. 400 words) of how it relates to class topics. *You can do this at any time from January 27 through April 8.* Ideally, you will submit that analysis at the time we are doing the relevant reading, so can discuss it during that class. You could, for example, find an interesting article on strife within the White House, or on president Trump's decision-making about national security matters, or about impeachment, and submit it on the appropriate dates. Your analysis should state explicitly how the news story or event fits with the issues raised in the reading.

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 includes 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 review of some major book about the presidency, with some presentation to the class about that material.

Grades Will Be Calculated as Follows

For POSC 308, each of the first two essays will be worth 20% of the grade. Your short piece about a news article will be worth 5%. The book review will count as 20% of your grade. The final essay will be 25%. Participation will count for 10% of the grade.

For POSC 408, each of the first two essays will count for 18% of the grade. The final essay will count for 20%. The short response about a news story will count for 4%. Each book review will count for 15%, 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 their assignments on time. This is especially important so that we can discuss essays on the days on which they are due, which means that if you do not submit the essay on time I will expect you to skip the class. I expect to reduce grades by up to 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 **including laptops**, should not be used in class unless I explicitly give permission at the beginning of the session.* I hate making this rule, because it is much cheaper for students to read on their computers as opposed to printing out material to bring to class. Unfortunately, my own observation strongly suggests that a large portion of my students who have open laptops are not looking at course reading material. Moreover, there is a significant body of research which strongly indicates that note-taking by hand is more effective than taking notes on a computer (e.g., see <https://www.brookings.edu/research/for-better-learning-in-college-lectures-lay-down-the-laptop-and-pick-up-a-pen/>)

The readings are a selection of book chapters, academic journal articles, magazine articles and a few news stories that I have decided are relevant. Some are classics in the political science literature, and some are from recent headlines. Eight of the chapters that I think are worth reading are from the same book. I don't quite feel it's fair to those authors to put half of a book on the course Canvas site, so I'm asking you to buy the book. Though of course if you find other ways to get copies of the chapters, that is not my business. The book is:

Julian E. Zelizer ed., *The Presidency of Barack Obama: A First Historical Assessment*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Other readings will be posted the course Canvas site or at the websites listed below. I may occasionally print and distribute some. If students are interested in having a printed reader prepared, I will see what I can do (one issue is how to pay for it; the other is how to print the material at the most reasonable price; but I'm willing to see what can be done).

Schedule of Discussions, Readings, and Assignments

The files on the course Canvas site should be in the order of this syllabus, with names that are not identical to the names below but should be close enough for recognition.

Please note that I may decide to replace some of the readings about the Trump administration, as events and publication warrant.

Jan 13 Introduction to class and each other.
Review of the syllabus and Article II of the Constitution.
<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>
Discussion: What you think you know about the Trump presidency and the presidency in general.

Part I: Development(s) of the Modern Presidency

Jan 15 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.
What do we want from presidents? What should we want? Do you think political scientists or legal scholars would give the same answers that average voters would? Would most peoples' answer depend on whether they like the incumbent? What is James saying about how and why expectations have changed?

Jan 20 **No Class, Martin Luther King Day**

Jan 22 James Pfiffner, "The Presidency: Origins and Powers." Chapter 1 in *The Modern Presidency 6th ed.* (Wadsworth/Cengage, 2011), pp. 1-17.
Richard E. Neustadt, excerpts from *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. (The Free Press, 1990). Chapters 1, 3, and "Preface to the 1990 edition."
Jack Goldsmith, "Will Donald Trump Destroy the Presidency?" *The Atlantic*

Sept. 12, 2017. At

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/will-donald-trump-destroy-the-presidency/537921/>

The president has a mix of formal and informal powers. Very few of the formal powers are explicitly stated in Article II, though some are arguably logical inferences from the limited language there. Many have developed over time, whether granted by Congress and the courts or appropriated by ambitious presidents. Why do presidential powers expand? To what extent does a president's power depend on what he does for himself, rather than the system around him? What does it mean to say that presidential power is the power to persuade?

Jan 27 Frank O. Bowman III, Excerpts from *High Crimes and Misdemeanors: A History of Impeachment for the Age of Trump*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Introduction, pp. 1-6. Chapter 4, "The Founders' Impeachment," pp. 80-111. Chapter 8, "The Fall of Richard Nixon," pp. 180-209.

Three things seem reasonably clear. First, the people who wrote and then those who ratified the Constitution thought that giving Congress an impeachment power was a good idea, and on balance they defined its potential justifications widely or, to put this another way, "politically." Second, they did this within an understanding that some behavior was beyond the pale – either simply morally reprehensible or too damaging to how government was supposed to operate. Third, they made agreeing on such a thing quite difficult, given the requirement for conviction by 2/3 of the Senate. We need to read about impeachment because of current events, but that should also lead us to think about how understandings may have changed over time, and what WE would see as necessary norms of behavior.

Jan 29 John A. Dearborn, "The 'Proper Organs' for Presidential Representation: A Fresh Look at the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921." *Journal of Policy History* 31(1), 2019.

Gene Healy, "The Cult of the Presidency." *Reason*, June 2008.

Submit your proposed book selection by today.

The Dearborn article provides a case study of one major expansion of presidential power, granted by Congress, and the ideas about government that helped justify that expansion (and still are used to promote greater power for presidents). The Healy piece provides a libertarian critique of such ideas about government and the presidency. We should talk about the varied rationales, from "efficiency" to "representation," that have been used. These rationales, and criticisms, may seem more or less reasonable as we learn more about the presidency...

Part II: Elections, and Presidents Within a More-or-Less Divided Nation

Feb 3 Joseph White, "Understanding Elections, Especially Presidential Elections." Unpublished manuscript, January 2020.

Since this reading basically says what I think is important to know, I expect discussion to be driven by student questions. Two obvious themes are: (1) how the 2020 election should be expected to work out and, (2) to what extent the process described seems "fair."

Feb 5 "Timeline" and Chapters 1-3 of Julian E. Zelizer ed., *The Presidency of Barack Obama: A First Historical Assessment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. Pp. xi-xxi, 1-44.

These chapters introduce the Obama presidency in two contexts: a massive economic crisis, and an opposition party with a dominant faction disposed to see all of his responses as illegitimate. The first could have been viewed as an opportunity to be a truly "transformative" president who re-cast the direction of American politics and government. The second, due to both the ways the constitutional design helps minorities block action and the tendency of presidents' parties to lose seats in midterm elections, could have been and was a major obstacle to any type of "transformation." In essence, these chapters involve political context *after* an election, so prospects to be viewed as having what Lyndon Johnson called the "right to govern" separately from the formal approval given by elections.

Note: The topic for the first essay will be distributed by this day, if it has not been provided earlier.

Feb 10 Ryan Lizza, "The Obama Memos: The making of a post-post-partisan Presidency." *The New Yorker*, January 30, 2012.
George Packer, "Hillary Clinton and the Populist Revolt," *The New Yorker*, October 24, 2016.
Peter Hessler, "How Trump is Transforming Rural America," *The New Yorker*, July 24, 2017.

No class discussion, as I will be traveling to present a talk.

These readings provide three further views of the social divisions, and how those divisions have related to the political parties, during the current and more recent past presidencies. Clearly President Obama hoped he could govern across party lines, and the first article is about him and others in his administration learning otherwise. The second two readings involve how, during the Obama and Clinton administrations, the Democrats lost support within two fractions of the country – what is currently called the

"white working class" and also white rural voters. We should talk about why (according to the readings or any other sources that come to mind) this has happened and what both Democratic and Republican presidents might do about it (obviously the latter wanting to encourage it). To what extent are these developments reactions to presidencies?

Feb 12 Lou Cannon, Prefaces and Chapters 2-4, pp. ix-xvii and 16-44 of *Ronald Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*. New York: Public Affairs, 2000.
Adam Gopnik, "How Charles De Gaulle Rescued France." *The New Yorker*, August 20, 2018.

Both the Reagan and the De Gaulle cases are examples of a kind of leadership by performance: of self-presentation in order to win support and identify the leader with a notion of what the country should be. We might suspect that the prominence and visibility of presidents means that they send such messages whether or not they mean to do it, or understand what they are sending. It is something presidents can do in a way that no other political official in the United States can approach. But how easy is it for presidents to make performance serve their ends? For example, what was Obama "performing?"

No class discussion, as I will still be traveling, for a second talk.

Feb 17 Excerpts from James P. Pfiffner, *The Character Factor: How We Judge America's Presidents* (Texas A&M University Press, 2004). Chapters 1-3 and 7 plus endnotes. Pages 1-64, 162-169, 171-181, 199.
Pfiffner, "Trump's lies corrode democracy." April 13, 2018. At

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2018/04/13/trumps-lies-corrode-democracy/>

The most logical question for discussion from this reading is what "character" has to do with presidents' support – either from voters or from other political actors (an aspect of what Neustadt called "Washington reputation"). A further question is whether there are any agreed norms about presidential behavior – and what it means if there are not. That of course feeds back to the impeachment topic – and to the evidence of division from the previous week's reading. Lots and lots to talk about.

Feb 19: **Discussion of First Essay;**
Essays should be submitted to Professor White by e-mail by 2:00 p.m.

Part III: Presidents and the Executive Branch, or, the Executive Power

Feb 24 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.

Jeremy Bailey, "The New Unitary Executive and Democratic Theory: The Problem of Alexander Hamilton." *American Political Science Review* Vol. 108, No. 4 (November 2008), pp. 453-465

James P. Pfiffner, "Public Administration Ethics in the Age of Trump," paper to the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Sept 1, 2019.

What the heck is the "executive power" anyway? This might be the most important puzzle about the presidency. Whatever it might be, there is a coterie of law professors and other theorists who insist that the executive power is "unitary," which means vested in the president and only the president. This leads to eminent scholars of the presidency writing about "unitary power" in ways that might lead us to wonder what other kind of executive power exists. It naturally leads to questions about what the designers of the system thought about these questions.² Bailey's article suggests that there is a tension between expecting effective execution of government's tasks from "presidential leadership" or from competent officials dedicated to the law. This in turn raises the question of what those officials should do when presented with a president who violates common understandings – the topic of Pfiffner's paper.

Feb 26 David E. Lewis, excerpts from *The Politics of Presidential Appointments* (Princeton, 2008). Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 1-50, 221-236.

Lou Cannon, Chapter 5, "Offstage Influences," pp. 45-65 in *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*. New York: Public Affairs, 1991 & 2000.

The topic of today's reading is the power of appointment. This is arguably the greatest source of presidential influence over the government. The first reading gives an outline of the extent of that power, and also some sense of the risks. Presidents want loyalty but they may also want competence. After all, having a loyal but not especially competent person in charge of the Federal Emergency Management Agency when Hurricane Katrina drowned New Orleans did not work out well for President Bush. Another aspect of the appointment process is how presidents select the major figures in their administrations. Ronald Reagan is an example of this process working fairly well, from the president's perspective – at least for his first term.

Mar 2 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).

² Naturally because of how Americans talk about our political system; it's hard to believe anyone in, say, France would look to people from a similar era (maybe Robespierre?) to validate ideas about public administration. Though I shouldn't be sure...

John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, "Do Presidential Memo Orders Substitute for Executive Orders? New Data." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 47(2) June, 2017: 378-393

Presidents can influence what government agencies do through the appointment power, and through the White House staff liaising with the (possibly loyal) political appointees to give them a sense of what the president (allegedly) wants. But a lot of attention is devoted, in the literature and even in public discussion, to more visible written decisions about what agencies should do, directly from the President. These are visible and can be significant but their importance can also be overstated. The basic question is what executive orders, or other versions such as Presidential Decision Memoranda, add to the appointment power.

Mar 4 Selected articles recommending use of the president's executive authorities by the next Democratic president, from the Fall, 2019 issue of *The American Prospect*.

Excerpts from Elena Kagan, "Presidential Administration," *Harvard Law Review* 114 (2000-2001). Introduction and Part II, pp. 2246-2253, 2272-2281.

While various people are infuriated by various executive orders from the Trump administration, as well as decisions made by agencies controlled by his appointees, it is worth remembering that executive initiative looks a bit different if it's your side taking the initiative. In the first of these readings, various authors in the liberal/left *American Prospect* magazine give examples of how authority might be used by a future Democratic president. We can talk about the plausibility of those hopes, and desirability of such procedures. In the second reading, future Justice (and at the time Dean of Harvard Law) Kagan describes some of the ways the Clinton administration used executive powers, and provides her rationale for those uses. It is important to remember that the prospect for such actions depends in part on whether the courts will accept them – which has not always been the case for President Trump, among others.

The topic for the second essay will be announced by today.

"Spring Break" March 9-13

Enjoy. I hope you can travel somewhere where it is actually Spring.

Mar 16 Louis Fisher, excerpts from *Presidential War Power 3rd ed.* (University Press of Kansas, 2013). Chapter 1, "The Constitutional Framework" 1-16. Chapter 11, "Covert Operations," 266-290. Chapter 12, "Restoring Checks and Balances," 291-311. Appendices A-E, 313-324.

Kathryn Olmsted, "Terror Tuesdays: How Obama Refined Bush's Counterterrorism Policies." Chapter 14 in Zelizer, *The Presidency of Barack Obama*, pp. 212-226.

Connie Bruck, "Why Obama Has Failed to Close Guantanamo," *The New Yorker*, August 1, 2016.

Returning from break, we get to discuss presidential power in national security matters. It seems fair to say that Obama acted a lot like Bush 43, though he made more of an effort to ensure his administration's actions fit plausible standards of legality. Then again, a major example of him not getting his way was on something that people who worried about rule of law agreed with him: closing Guantanamo. In that case he was blocked by both the bureaucracy and Congress. This raises all sorts of questions about presidential power.

Mar 18 Excerpts from Peter Baker, *Days of Fire: Bush and Cheney in the White House*. New York: Doubleday, 2013. Pp. 494-532.

Peter A. Baker and Mark Mazetti, "Brennan Draws on Bond With Obama in Backing CIA." *New York Times*, 12/14/14.

The Baker reading about Bush and Cheney involves two topics: President Bush finally firing Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and his efforts to convince his own administration to agree to increase American troop levels in Iraq after the 2006 election, known as the "surge." The other article also looks at internal decision-making processes, but in the Obama administration. They give us a look at all sorts of dynamics, from the fact that in the end presidents make decisions for their administrations (if they're sure enough), to possible influence from experts, to making decisions in the shadows of Congress and public opinion, to the human dimension of presidential responsibility, to how personal relationships – in these cases with the Vice President and CIA Director – can shape decisions.

Mar 23 Lou Cannon, chapter 21, "The New Era," from *Ronald Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, pp. 663-710

Susan B. Glasser, "The Secretary of Trump: How Mike Pompeo became a heartland evangelical – and the President's most loyal soldier." *The New Yorker*, Aug 26, 2019.

The Cannon reading gives an account of President Reagan's response to, and negotiations with, Mikhail Gorbachev once the latter became leader of the Soviet Union. At one level, it involves the crucial role of presidents in foreign policy. At another, it gives some further indication of presidents not simply leading but also dealing with their national security establishments. At a third, it shows the importance of

presidential personality. The Glasser reading provides another view of relationship between presidents and their national security executives – more from the latter's side. Perhaps it will be replaced by something on the conflict with Iran/Iraq/Whoever that seemed to be escalating at the time I was writing this syllabus, late on January 2.

- Mar 25** James P. Pfiffner, "Organizing the Trump Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 48(1), March 2018, 153-167.
Susan B. Glasser, "John Kelly, Scott Pruitt, and the Epic Turnover of the Trump Administration." *The New Yorker*, July 6, 2018.
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.

There is some conventional wisdom about organizing the structure of advice closest to the president, or, "the White House." Observers see some alternatives, but it's fair to say that how the Trump presidency was constructed did not fit any model, and that has become more true over time. We could do a whole course on this topic, but will only brush over it lightly. The piece on Obama provides another example, and we will refer back to the Lou Cannon account of putting together the Reagan presidency – which is sort of a best-case scenario. One thing to remember is that White Houses have to serve the working style of their presidents. Another is that this might mean buffering them against their own weaknesses.

- Mar 30** **Discussion of Second Essay;**
Essays should be submitted to Professor White by e-mail by 2:00 p.m.

Part IV: The President and Congress

- Apr 1** Andrew Rudalevige, "The Executive Branch and the Legislative Process," Chapter 13 in Aberbach and Peterson eds., *The Executive Branch*, pp. 419-451.

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

Presidents have a constitutional role in legislation, through the veto. They have an informal role as leaders of their party, which both gives them support from their co-partisans and may lead to reflexive opposition from the other side. They have further potential influence from attempting to lead public opinion, both to rally public opinion to influence legislators and by influencing the agenda of topics getting attention. They can also use their other powers to influence legislators, such as when Lyndon Johnson arranged for the Republican leader in the House to receive some research funding for his

local university in return for cooperating to allow consideration of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. These readings begin our discussion of sources of power within the legislative process. I regret that we will not be able to cover the topic at more length.

Apr 1 George Edwards, Preface and Chapter 1 of *The Strategic President*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
George Edwards, "'Closer' or Context? Explaining Donald Trump's Relations With Congress." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 48(3), Sept 2018, pp. 456-479.

There are two main lines of interpretation of presidents as legislators. The first emphasizes what presidents can do, and so leans towards claims that presidents will have more influence if they have more skill. The second puts greater weight on the political and institutional context or constraints. For example, if Barack Obama was not as successful as LBJ, was that because he was not as skilled or because he faced more negative conditions? The right answer is "both," but Edwards provides the best statement of the importance of conditions. Students should read his material with the early Neustadt reading in mind.

Apr 6 Jon Bond, "Validity and Reliability of Identifying Presidential Positions on Roll-Call Votes in the Age of Trump." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 49(1), March 2019, pp. 153-167.
John B. Gilmour, "Political Theater or Bargaining Failure: Why Presidents Veto." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 41(3), Sept. 2011, pp. 471-487.
Joel Sievert and Ian Ostrander, "Constraining Presidential Ambition: Controversy and the Decline of Signing Statements." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 47(4), December 2017, pp. 248-272.

Any discussion of presidential success in Congress assumes, as I stated in my speech about Bush, that we can tell what the president wants. This cannot be taken for granted, as Jon Bond points out in discussing the difficulties of analyzing President Trump's success. Communications issues also are central to the other two readings. Vetoes normally are preceded by threats, but Congress has to figure out if threats are serious. And a president might veto not because he is sure of winning, but because he thinks making the fight sends a desired message to voters. Conversely, Congressional leaders may provoke a veto as a way of dramatizing a conflict to the public. "Signing statements" are an effect to have cake and eat it too: to avoid the costs of a veto but say some aspect of the law won't be applied anyway. They were cited as a prime example of growing presidential power during the Bush 43 administration, but the reading argues that it didn't quite turn out that way.

Apr 8 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.

It hurts me to give only limited attention to budgeting, which is the central process of governance and the most fundamental topic on which cooperation between the president and Congress is vital, but so it goes. I will probably add some information about budgeting over the past few years. At a minimum, I will lecture about that. Budgeting raises every possible issue about power and purpose. It is also the major way through which Congress can exercise power over the federal agencies, in opposition to the president.

Apr 13 **Book Reviews Due by e-mail to Professor White by 2:00 pm.**
Class discussion about the books.

Part V: Consequences for Policy and the Political System

April 15 Jonathan Zimmerman, "Education in the Age of Obama: The Paradox of Consensus," and Matthew D. Lassiter, "'Tough and Smart': The Resilience of the War on Drugs during the Obama Administration." Chapters 8 and 11 in Zelizer, *The Presidency of Barack Obama*. Pages 111-126, 162-178 and notes at 294-296, 303-307.

It seems reasonable to assume that one reason the rest of us should care about presidents is that they influence public policy: what government does to and for whom. But they compete to influence any given policy with a host of other institutions and actors, both inside and outside government. Any policy area also has its established patterns and stakes and problems: what is often called a policy inheritance. For example, presidents inherit challenges from their predecessors (consider Obama and Iraq, or Clinton and the budget deficit!). Other reading has looked at the broad areas of security policy and economic policy. In these readings we turn to President Obama's influence in two other controversial realms. Some things to think about: Where did Obama get his own ideas? To what extent were other members of his administration leading or at least guiding its efforts? Can we say some actions were different from what he would have preferred, due to pressures from other holders of political resources and authority? What do these two cases tell us about presidential influence?

April 20: Stephen Skowronek, excerpts from *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal*. University Press of Kansas, 2008. Preface, Chapter 1, and Chapter 6.
"There is a tide in the affairs of men

Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life,
is bound in shallows and miseries..."³

Skowronek's book is not just about time or timing in politics and for presidents, but about time as not linear but cyclical – and so much like the tides. He has argued for a few decades now that American politics gets re-made, largely through presidential leadership, in fairly standard cycles. In essence, a dominant coalition of groups and set of attitudes about government and society forms; gains power in the form of a "transformative" president; enacts some of its agenda; and then goes through a process of temporary defeat and decay, return to power, further rejection, perhaps one more round of power in greatly weakened form, and finally is replaced by a new coalition and ideology. This is a grand theory of presidents' places in American politics, which makes claims about how both presidents shape macro-politics and vice versa. The most obvious question as Skowronek wrote was which Obama would be. The obvious question now is where both Obama and Trump fit. This is not to say that his periodization is entirely correct. Yet Skowronek's work has posed some of the biggest questions about presidential power.

April 22: Meg Jacobs, "Obama's Fight Against Global Warming," and Sarah R. Coleman, "A Promise Unfulfilled, an Imperfect Legacy: Obama and Immigration Policy." Chapters 5 and 12 in Zelizer ed., *The Presidency of Barack Obama*. Pages 62-77, 179-194, and notes at 288-89, 307-310.

We return to more modest issues than Skowronek's, but nevertheless to major issues in which the success or failures of presidents will help shape the nation and the world. One logical topic is why Obama's success was so limited. Another is what these cases tell us about the various aspects of presidential power. A third is whether President Trump is being more or less successful – and why.

April 27: Guy Snodgrass, "Inside Trump's First Pentagon Briefing." *Politico*, Oct 21, 2019. At <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/10/21/inside-trumps-first-pentagon-briefing-229865>

Mike McIntyre et al, "In Trump's Twitter Feed: Conspiracy Mongers, Racists, and Spies." *New York Times*, Nov 2, 2019. At <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/02/us/politics/trump-twitter-disinformation.html>

Our final readings bring us back to the highly unusual incumbent President. The first gives another look at how he relates to what he may or may not think of as "his own" government (maybe not) or administration (maybe?). The second is about how he both gets and communicates ideas. It's important to remember that social media is not only how he communicates with his public, but apparently also where he gets a lot

³ Brutus to Cassius in Act 4, Scene 3 of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

of his information. Both readings suggest that President Trump is separate from the institutional presidency in ways that raise lots of questions about what the consequences might be for him, for us, and for American political institutions. But those have in some ways been the unstated background concerns of the course: is the presidency bigger than President Trump, or is Trump bigger than the institutional presidency?

May 6: Final Essays Due to Professor White by Noon
Please send a copy by e-mail and also bring a printed copy to the class discussion.
Class Discussion and Luncheon, Noon – 2:30 p.m.
Mather House 100

Appendix:

Examples of Books for Your Book Review Assignment

Your assignment is to write a report on one book about a specific presidency. The book could be an overview of the entire presidency (including biographies of presidents), or focus on a specific aspect of that presidency. *Bush at War*, for instance, focuses on President George W. Bush's response to the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Afghanistan. *The Center Holds: Obama and His Enemies* focuses on President Obama's re-election.

You must submit your choice to me for approval. I want to make sure the choices are respectable and potentially useful, and I also want to make sure we don't have a whole bunch of people doing the same books.

There are some very interesting books on presidencies that you are very welcome to read but I fear will decide are too long, so don't list here. Examples include President Clinton's autobiography, *My Life*; Stuart Eizenstat's *President Carter: The White House Years*; or Jon Meacham's *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush*; or White and Wildavsky's *The Deficit and the Public Interest* (shameless plug). Please remember that I am asking you only to write on presidents from Carter onward.

The list that follows includes just a few plausible ideas.

Jonathan Alter. *The Promise: President Obama, Year One*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011.

Jonathan Alter. *The Center Holds: Obama and His Enemies*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014.

George W. Bush. *Decision Points*. New York: Broadway Books, 2010.

George Bush and Brent Scowcroft. *A World Transformed*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.

Scott A. Frisch and Sean Q. Kelly. *Jimmy Carter and the Water Wars: Presidential Influence and the Politics of Pork*. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008.

Barton Gellman. *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency*. New York: Penguin, 2008.

William Greider. *The Education of David Stockman, and Other Americans*. Plume, 1982.

Joe Klein. *The Natural: The Misunderstood Presidency of Bill Clinton*. New York: Broadway Books, 2003.

Robert Reich. *Locked in the Cabinet*. New York: Vintage, 1997.

Ben Rhodes. *The World As It Is: A Memoir of the Obama White House*. New York: Random House, 2018.

Ron Suskind. *The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, The White House, and the Education of Paul O'Neill*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004.

Ron Suskind. *Confidence Men: Wall Street, Washington, and the Education of a President*. New York: Harper Collins, 2011.

Michael Tomasky, *Bill Clinton*. New York: Times Books, 2017.

Bob Woodward. *The Agenda: Inside the Clinton White House*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.

Bob Woodward. *Bush at War*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.

(Bob Woodward: there's lots of other possibilities....)