

Course # | The Presidency

Description

This course surveys the politics of the American presidency in a system where power is distributed across branches of government. From this institutional perspective, the course uses historical and contemporary examples to engage the following questions: What is presidential power and what are its implications for American democracy? When do presidents succeed—and why do they fail? How do presidents manage relations with Congress, the courts, the bureaucracy, and the public? How do presidents make decisions about war and peace? Through answering these questions, the course illuminates the factors that shape the behavior of the world’s most powerful political leader.

Assignments

- (1) *Response papers* (x2): The readings for each class are accompanied by two or three reflection questions. Sign up for two classes from different “parts” of the course for which you will compose a 1000-word position paper on one question for that date. Papers are due by 11:59 PM one week after the class to which you are responding.
- (2) *Simulations/ Case Studies* (x5): One in-class simulation and four case studies will take place throughout the semester. In addition to participating in these activities, you will be asked to respond to several short reflection questions about the experience.
- (3) *Presidential Profile & Assessment*: The major work of this semester is the writing of a term paper between 4,000 and 5,000 words in length. The paper will profile the administration of a president of your choosing, offering an analysis of that president’s decisions informed by the theories studied in the class. Additionally, it will evaluate the “success” of the chosen president in achieving his goals in the face of his unique circumstances. A number of mandatory, interim assignments are designed to help you write this paper:
 - a. 500-word proposal due [date]
 - b. 500-word propositional outline due [date]
 - c. Rough draft due [date]
 - d. Final draft due [date]
- (4) *Final Exam*: A closed-book, open-note final exam will be held during the university’s exam period. It will consist of short essay questions covering the material of the course as a whole.

Course Schedule

1. Presidential Power

Colonial Origins and the Idea of a Presidency

01.
 - Constitution of the United States, Article II.
 - Publius, *The Federalist*, No. 67.
 - David Brian Robertson, *The Original Compromise: What the Constitution’s Framers Were Really Thinking*, Chapters 10 and 11.
 - Eric Nelson, “Introduction,” in *The Royalist Revolution*, pp. 1–28.

Presidential Power: The Framers’ Design and Intent

02.
 - Publius, *The Federalist*, No. 69–72 (1788).
 - “Debate on Executive Power,” and “Opposition to a Unitary Executive,” in *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates*, pp. 16–17 and 21–23.
 - Cato, No. 4 (1788).
 - Akhil Reed Amar, “Presidential Powers,” in *America’s Constitution: A Biography*, pp. 177-204.

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- Jeffrey Tulis, “The Two Constitutional Presidencies,” in Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System*, pp. 1-32.
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Historical Development: Washington to Jackson

- 03.
- Alexis de Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Edited by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 114–130.
 - Sidney Milkis and Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776–2014*, Chapters 3&5.
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Historical Development: Lincoln to Wilson

- 04.
- Sidney Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776–2014*, Chapters 6 and 8.
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Contemporary Foundations of Presidential Power

- 05.
- Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: Free Press. Chapters 1 and 3.
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Working with Congress

- 06.
- Publius, *The Federalist*, No. 47–48, 51 (1788).
 - Carl Hulse et al, “Obama is Seen as Frustrating His Own Party,” *The New York Times*, (August 19, 2014).
 - Charles Cameron and Jee-Kwang Park, “A Primer on the President’s Legislative Program,” in *Presidential Leadership*, pp. 45–77.
-

Veto Politics

- 07.
- Publius, *The Federalist*, No. 73 (1788).
 - Charles Cameron, “The Presidential Veto,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency*.
 - Congressional Research Service, “Regular Vetoes and Pocket Vetoes: In Brief,” RS22188 (2019).
-

Unilateral Power

- 08.
- Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “Behind Closed Doors, Obama Crafts Executive Action,” *The New York Times*, (August 19, 2014).
 - Yuval Levin and Adam J. White, “The Return of Pen-and-Phone Constitutionalism,” *National Review Online*. (August 9, 2020).
 - Publius, *The Federalist*, No. 74, 76–77 (1788).
 - Andrew Rudalevige, “The Presidency and Unilateral Power: A Taxonomy,” in Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System*, pp. 463–488.

[CASE STUDY: “President Cleveland and the Pullman Strike”]

War and Peace

- 09.
- Publius, *The Federalist*, No. 74 (review), 75 (1788).
 - Hamilton, Alexander, and James Madison. 2007. *The Pacificus-Helvidius Debates of 1793-1794*. Excerpts.
 - Gene Healy and John Glaser, “Repeal, Don’t Replace, Trump’s War Powers,” *New York Times*, April 17, 2018.
 - Mariah Zeisberg, *War Powers: The Politics of Constitutional Authority*, Chapter 1.
-

War, Foreign Policy, and Presidential Power

- 10.
- Publius, *The Federalist*, No. 75 (review) (1788).
 - Aaron Wildavsky (1966), “The Two Presidencies.” *Trans-Action* 4: 7-14.
 - Lisa Martin, “The President and International Commitments: Treaties as Signaling Devices,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (September 2005).
 - William G. Howell, Saul P. Jackman, and Jon C. Rogowski. 2013. “War and the American Presidency,” in *The Wartime President*. Chapter 1.

[CASE STUDY: “Presidents as Sovereigns”]

The Executive Branch and The Bureaucracy

- 11.
- NPR, “Obama Office Alters More Federal Rules than Bush.” November 28, 2011. (6 minutes).
 - S. Stillman. Feb. 8, 2021. “The Race to Dismantle Trump’s Immigration Policies.” *The New Yorker*.
 - Gary D. Libecap. 2007. “The Federal Bureaucracy: From Patronage to Civil Service.” In *Government and American Economy: A New History*.
 - David E. Lewis and Terry M. Moe. “The Presidency and the Bureaucracy: The Levers of Presidential Control.” In Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System*, pp. 367–400.

2. The Road to the White House

Getting Nominated

- 12.
- Jonathan Rauch, “How American Politics Went Insane,” *The Atlantic* (July/August 2016)
 - Richard M. Pious, “The Presidency and the Nominating Process: Politics and Power,” in Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System*, pp. 167–191.

[SIMULATION: “The Primaries”]

Getting Elected

- 13.
- Publius, *The Federalist*, No. 68 (1788).
 - “Election and Term of Office of the National Executive” and “Election of the Executive,” in *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates*, pp. 98–105 and 117–121.
 - John Sides, Daron R. Shaw, Matthew Grossmann, and Keena Lipsitz, eds. 2014, “Presidential Campaigns,” in *Campaigns & Elections: Rules, Reality, Strategy, Choice: 2012 Election Update*, Chapter 8.
 - George C. Edwards III, “The Faulty Premises of the Electoral College,” in Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System*, pp. 192–207.

Taking the Reins: Presidential Transitions

- 14.
- Roger B. Porter, “Of Hazards and Opportunities: Transitions and the Modern Presidency,” Paper prepared for Presidential Power Revisited Conference, Woodrow Wilson Center, June 1996, pp. 1–18.
 - Martha Joynt Kumar, “The 2008 National Security Council Transition: Providing Continuity in a Bipartisan Environment,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43 No. 3 (September 2013), pp. 490–522.

3. The President, The Political System, and Leadership

Organizing the White House

- 15.
- Richard E. Neustadt. 2001. “The Weakening White House.” *British Journal of Political Science* 31: 1–11.

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- John Burke, “The Institutional Presidency,” in Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System*, pp. 341–366.
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Judicial Nominations

- Publius, *The Federalist*, No. 66, 78 (review) (1788).
 - Lee Epstein, Rene Lindstadt, Jeffrey A. Segal, and Chad Westerland. 2005. “The Changing Dynamics of Senate Voting on Supreme Court Nominees.” *Journal of Politics* 68(2): 296–307.
 - PBS, *Supreme Revenge: Battle for the Court*, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/supreme-revenge/>. (54 minutes)
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Law, Judicial Review, and the Presidency

- *Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. v. Sawyer*, 343 U.S. 579 (1952).
 - *United States v. Nixon*, 418 U.S. 683 (1974).
 - Jeff Yates and Andrew Whitford. 1998. “Presidential Power and the United States Supreme Court.” *Political Research Quarterly* 51: 539–550.
 - Whittington, Keith E. 2001. “Presidential Challenges to Judicial Supremacy and the Politics of Constitutional Meaning.” *Polity* 33: 365–395.
-

Presidents, Parties, and Interest Groups

- Daniel J. Tichenor, “The Presidency and Interest Groups: Allies, Adversaries, and Policy Leadership” in Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System*, pp. 264–294.
 - Sidney Milkis, “The Presidency and Political Parties,” in Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System*, pp. 295–340.
-

The Presidency and the Press

- Lawrence R. Jacobs, “The Presidency and the Press: The Paradox of the White House Press War,” in Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System*, pp. 236–263.
- Eric C. Wiemer and Joshua M. Scacco. 2018. “Disruptor-in-chief? The networked influence of President Trump in building and setting the agenda.” *The Agenda Setting Journal* 2(2): 191–213.

[CASE STUDY: “Al Gore and the ‘Embellishment’ Issue: Press Coverage of the Gore Presidential Campaign.”]

Presidents and the Public

- Samuel Kernell. 2006. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*. Chapters 1 and 2.
 - Canes-Wrone, Brandice, and Scott de Marchi. 2002. “Presidential Approval and Legislative Success.” *Journal of Politics* 64: 491 – 509.
-

Electoral Incentives and Presidential Governance

- Daniel Q. Gillion. 2013. “The Impact of Minority Protest on Presidential Responsiveness.” *The Political Power of Protest*, Chapter 4.
 - Brandice Canes-Wrone, Michael C. Herron and Kenneth W. Shotts. 2001. “Leadership and Pandering: A Theory of Executive Policymaking.” *American Journal of Political Science* 45: 532–550.
 - Douglas Kriner and Andrew Reeves. 2015. “Presidential Particularism and Divide-the-Dollar Politics.” *American Political Science Review* 109: 155-171.
-

Secrecy and Dispatch

22.
 - Publius, *The Federalist*, No. 70 (review) (1788).
 - Robert M. Pallitto and William G. Weaver. 2007. *Presidential Secrecy and the Law*, Chapter 1.
 - Benjamin A. Kleinerman. 2009. *The Discretionary President: The Promise and Peril of Executive Power*. Introduction and Chapter 9.

Accountability and Oversight

23.
 - Douglas Kriner and Eric Schickler. 2018. “The Resilience of Separation of Powers: Congress and the Russia Investigation.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 48(3): 436–455.
 - Fisher, “Power Over Knowledge: Seeking and Withholding Information,” in *Constitutional Conflicts between Congress and the President*, pp. 160-195.

[CASE STUDY: Congressional Oversight and Presidential Prerogative: The 1991 Intelligence Authorization Act”]

Impeachment

24.
 - Publius, *The Federalist*, No. 65–66 (1788).
 - Tocqueville, “On Political Judgment in the United States,” in *Democracy in America*: 100–104.
 - Charles Black, *Impeachment: A Handbook*, pp. 1-69.

4. Conclusions

Presidential Style and Character

25.
 - F. McDonald. 1997. “Presidential Character: The Example of George Washington.” *Perspectives on Political Science* 26(3): 134–39.
 - S. Clifford. 2018. “Reassessing the Structure of Presidential Character.” *Electoral Studies* 54: 240–47.
 - Michael Nelson, “The Psychological Presidency,” in Nelson, *The Presidency and the Political System*, pp. 142–166.
 - Paul Quirk, “Presidential Competence,” in Nelson, *The Presidency and the Political System*, pp. 108–136.

Presidential Effectiveness and Circumstances

26.
 - S. Skowronek. 1993. *The Politics Presidents Make*. Chapters 1–3.

Evaluating Presidents and the Presidency

27.
 - Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., “Rating the Presidents: From Washington to Clinton,” *Political Science Quarterly*, (Summer 1997), pp. 179-190.
 - Andrew Ross Sorkin, “President Obama Weighs His Economic Legacy,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 28, 2016.
 - Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Obama Doctrine,” *The Atlantic* (April 2016).
 - Charles M. Lamb and Jacob R. Neiheisel. 2020. “On Studying the Trump Presidency.” In *Presidential Leadership and the Trump Presidency*, 1–15.

The President and the Constitutional Order

28.
 - William G. Howell and Terry M. Moe. 2016. *Relic: How Our Constitution Undermines Effective Governance — And Why We Need a More Powerful Presidency*. Chapters 3 and 4.
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