

# The US Presidency

Political Science 467 / Spring 2023

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Class Session: T/R @ 4 – 5:20PM // Location: PETR 102

## Course Description

This course is designed to enhance your understanding of the power and limitations of the American presidency as a political institution, as well as the individuals who have held the office and sought to lead the nation. Three key questions will guide our study of the presidency:

- *Why is the relationship between executive power and constitutional democracy uneasy, and how has it evolved over time?* The architects of the U.S. Constitution were wary of investing too much power in the presidency, potentially elevating one over the many. As presidential power has grown over time, some argue that as the only official chosen by the national electorate, presidents are the only leaders who reflect the popular will. Others contend that presidents can pose an authoritarian threat to constitutional democracy by exercising too much unilateral power.
- *Presidents vary dramatically in how well they exercise leadership— is this mostly because of individual performance or circumstances?* Presidency scholars disagree whether the capacity of presidents to lead is shaped more by individual skills and character or by structural opportunities and timing. This debate dovetails with broader political science arguments concerning agency versus structure. We will consider how presidential leadership is influenced both by the individuals who occupy the Oval Office and by structural opportunities and constraints they face.
- *What role have American presidents played in either the violent repression and political exclusion of marginalized groups—or the expansion of basic democratic rights for Blacks, Indigenous people, Asians, Latinos, women, LGBTQ people, religious minorities, and other oppressed groups?* Social mobilization for issues concerning sex, race, class, gender, reproduction, labor, and citizenship is central to the dynamics between *the people* and *the state*. Indeed, *American Exceptionalism* is precisely about *the exceptions* required to be American. Historical inequalities, and the struggle for inclusion, are integral to the expansion of suffrage and the engine of American democracy. Most presidency classes do not focus on this question of how presidents have advanced, or thwarted, democratic inclusion, but this is not like most presidency classes.

## Course Organization and Policies

The first half of this course focuses on the constitutional origins of the American presidency; critiques of the electoral college system; early executive responses to slavery, tribal nations, and civil war; the evolution of presidential election politics; the rise of the popular modern presidency; executive responses to the early Black civil rights movement; public politics

and media relations; presidential psychology and character; structural openings and barriers for presidential leadership; and the presidency and Civil Rights reform.

In the second half of the term, we examine the Reagan Revolution and the rise of polarized party politics; legislative, executive, and judicial politics; Obama, Trump, and movement politics; war, secrecy, and presidential deception; White House crisis management; prerogative power, civil liberties, and national security; presidents, constitutional democracy, and the abuse of power; and conceptions of presidential greatness. These topics will allow us to explore a variety of significant issues of special relevance, from the White House response to the coronavirus pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, to the consequences of the bruising 2020 presidential campaign and the future of U.S. constitutional democracy in an era of intense partisan polarization. Across all these subjects, my aim is to provide numerous opportunities for you to engage this material through both interactive live class sessions and diverse asynchronous material.

For most of our class sessions, we will follow a clear agenda:

- ***Democracy Now!*** (*Watch headlines from news around the world, brief discussion*)
- ***Lecture w/ Talking points*** (a few key highlights on the days materials from me)
- ***Q & A*** (opportunity for you to raise questions drawn from the lectures, readings, podcasts, and other materials)
- ***Breakout Session*** (a focused activity for smaller breakout groups, followed by a larger class discussion)
- ***Unplugged Time*** (I will stay around at the end of class to talk and field lingering questions) This should be the ideal opportunity for informal office hours. If you need *formal* office hour arrangements, please contact me and we can schedule it.

### **Course Grades and Assignments**

**Formatting for all assignments should be follow these guidelines:** 12-point font, Times New Roman, Double spaced, 1” margins, footnotes (in 10pt font), page numbers. No bibliography is necessary (citations can be, for example, Pika, 30-34).

**Course Journal:** The course journal will encourage you to briefly reflect on the material for each class. Each journal entry should be roughly 2-3 pages in response to one of the questions each week on Canvas. Your journal entries should evidence clear engagement with assigned material, be written clearly, and be proofread before submission.

**Discussion Posts:** Students will response to a weekly discussion post on Canvas. The prompts will be related to weekly materials and be reference material for continuing in class conversation and debates.

**Participation/Attendance:** Your participation grade will be based on attending and engaging in our class sessions. Debate, discussion, and conversation are essential to classes concerned with politics and history. Missing class will result in penalty without exceptional reason. If participation is slacking, I reserve the right to issue a *reading pop quiz*. Moreover, generally, it is a good idea to have at least skimmed the readings *before* class.

**Late submission policy:** All assignments will have due dates listed in Canvas. Generally, all assignments are due Sunday at 11:59 pm. Assignments that are submitted late may be subject to penalty of up to half a letter grade per day. If you have circumstances which arise and prevent you from being on time, then please contact me ASAP.

**Calculating the Grade:** Your final grade will be calculated based on the following:

Class Attendance	15%
Journal Entries x8	70%
Discussion Posts x3	15%
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Required Readings**

There are two required books for this course. You must obtain these in either physical or digital format. It is impossible to pass this course without them, as they are necessary for the journal entries and will be useful for your term paper. The Duckstore should have these in stock. All other readings will be available on our Canvas site. The required texts are:

Joseph Pika, John Anthony Maltese, and Andrew Rudalevige, *The Politics of the Presidency*, 10<sup>th</sup> edition (Congressional Quarterly, 2020).

Sidney Milkis and Daniel Tichenor, *Rivalry and Reform: Presidents, Social Movements, and the Transformation of American Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2019).

### **Learning Outcomes**

Students who complete this course and its assignments will develop an understanding of the key institutions, ideas, and interests at work in American politics, and will gain knowledge about a variety of key substantive policy and issue areas. This course also is designed to help build important critical skills and tools, including the following:

- To gain a demonstrated working knowledge of several major policy and political issues that lie at the heart of U.S. political debates today.
- To develop a deeper understanding of the workings and impact of the American political system at the local, state, national, and international levels.
- To grasp and apply important political concepts and theories of constitutional democracy.
- To help you reason well through varied problems and issues, whether in the classroom or in your personal and professional life. As Paul and Elder note, critical thinking “involves three interwoven phrases: It analyzes thinking, it evaluates thinking, and it improves thinking.” The work you do in and for this seminar is designed to enhance your critical thinking skills and tools, whether you are engaged in discussions or debates, presentations, or writing. That is, we hope to encourage all participants to ask good questions that reach past the allure of easy answers.

## **COURSE ROADMAP: TERM OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE**

### **Class #1.1: April 4—Course Introductions**

1. Name card activity, introductions
2. Review Syllabus and class meeting schedule
3. Establish Course and Classroom expectations.
4. Make sure you have obtained the required books.

### **Class #2.1: April 6—Why do we have a President? How the Presidency was invented.**

1. Pika et al, *The Politics of Presidency*, chapter 1.

### **Class #3.2: April 11—How do we pick Presidents? The politics of elections.**

1. Pika et al, *The Politics of Presidency*, chapter 2.

### **Class #4.2: April 13—What is the relationship between Presidents and the public?**

1. Pika et al, *The Politics of Presidency*, chapter 3.

#### *Assignments Due*

1. Discussion #1

### **Class #5.3: April 18—What makes a good (or bad) President?**

1. Pika et al, *The Politics of Presidency*, chapter 4.

### **Class #6.3: April 20—Is Presidential greatness about Agency or Structure?**

1. Stephen Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, (pdf on Canvas).

#### *Assignments Due*

1. Journal Entry #1

### **Class #7.4: April 25—Presidential Leadership from the Civil War to Early Civil Rights**

1. Milkis & Tichenor, *Rivalry and Reform*, chapters 2 and 3.

### **Class #8.4: April 27—The Battle for Civil Rights in Modern Liberalism**

1. Milkis & Tichenor, *Rivalry and Reform*, chapter 4.

#### *Assignments Due*

1. Journal Entry #2

### **Class #9.5: May 2—Friends or Foes? Presidents, Congress, and the Bureaucracy**

1. Pika et al, *The Politics of Presidency*, chapters 5 and 6.

### **Class #10.5: May 4—How do Presidents influence Courts and Judges?**

1. Pika et al, *The Politics of Presidency*, chapter 7.

*Assignments Due*

1. Journal Entry #3

**Class #11.6: May 9—Christians, Conservatives, and the Origins of The New Right**

1. Milkis & Tichenor, *Rivalry and Reform*, chapters 5 and 6.

**Class #12.6: May 11—Polarizing Presidents in the Age of Rage: Obama and Trump**

1. Milkis & Tichenor, *Rivalry and Reform*, chapters 7.

*Assignments Due*

1. Journal Entry #4
2. Discussion #2

**Class #13.7: May 16—President's and the Politics of National Security and War Powers**

1. Pika et al, *The Politics of Presidency*, chapter 9.
2. Watch *War Made Easy pt 1 – stop at 36:40*

**Class #14.7: May 18—The American War Machine**

1. Pika et al, *The Politics of Presidency*, chapter 10.
3. Watch *War Made Easy pt 2 – start at 36:40*

*Assignments Due*

1. Journal Entry #5

**Class #15.8: May 23—Presidents and Social Movements for Labor, Women's Suffrage**

1. Jedyel (2002) *The Impact of the Activist President on Lobbying Efforts of the Woman Suffrage Movement*
2. Tichenor (1999) *The Presidency and Lessons from the Woman's Suffrage and Labor Movements*

**Class #16.8: May 25—Social Movements continued**

1. Pika et al, *The Politics of Presidency*, chapter 8. (skim)
2. Milkis & Tichenor, *Rivalry and Reform*, chapter 1. (skim)

*Assignments Due*

1. Journal Entry #6

**Class #17.9: May 30— Presidents and Immigration Rights Activism**

1. Zepeda-Millán (2017) *Latino Mass Mobilization: Immigration, Racialization, and Activism*, chapter 1 and 6 (pdf on Canvas).

**Class #18.9: June 1—Dissertation Related (immigration continued)**

1. Ellis, Dustin, introduction chapter

*Assignments Due*

1. Journal Entry #7

**Class #19.X: June 6— The Good, The Bad, and the Forgettable: Rating Presidents!**

1. Ellis, *Evaluating Presidents*, (pdf on Canvas).

**Class #20.X: June 8—Final Thoughts, Concluding Remarks, Review Game, Snacks!**

*Assignments Due*

1. Journal Entry #8

**No Class Finals Week for Class #21/22: June 13-15**

*Assignments Due*

1. Discussion #3

**OTHER INFORMATION**

**Office Hours and Communications**

Office hours will be by appointment only. Usually most questions can be addressed immediately after class, but if you want to schedule formal office hours then please contact me and it can be arranged.

You also can reach me via email at dellis@uoregon.edu (I check this regularly).

**Class Etiquette:** Try to sit such that 1 desk/seat is empty between each person. Generally practice safe and clean hygiene (like wash your hands, don't cough/sneeze on someone). You can get up the use the restroom without permission, just be respectful and mindful of the shared space.

**Guidelines for Class Discussions:** Below are some useful guidelines for discussions to keep in mind this term for both general discussions and in-class debates:

*Discussing to Learn:* Contribute ideas and views in the spirit of inquiring and learning together, rather than trying to debate or win arguments (unless the activity is designed as a debate or to assess best arguments).

*Mindful Listening:* Listen actively with attention and respect for what others are saying, without interrupting or tuning out to focus on preparing one's own contribution.

*Stepping Up/Stepping Back:* Pay attention to the voices in the room and be mindful of one's contributions. Are there patterns regarding which voices are being heard and which are not? How do I fit in these patterns? Is there need to step back and let others have opportunity to contribute? Is there need to step up and contribute more? Do we feel empowered to hold ourselves accountable for our class participation dynamics?

*Listening Lenience:* Remember that we are learning together and may not necessarily get something right the first or even second try. Practice being lenient with oneself and with others. Restating what someone just said can provide them an opportunity to clarify or revise their

statement. Similarly, it is good practice to state when you say something not quite right and then try to state it again or ask for help in saying it.

*Ideas not Individuals:* Focus on engaging others' ideas not judging or criticizing individuals. Asking for clarification can be helpful, and using language such as "The idea I hear you saying is..." (rather than "you said") or "I don't agree with that idea..." (rather than "I don't agree with you).

*Support Our Statements:* Offer supporting evidence of some kind to back up your contributions, such as data, clear reasoning or reference to a text, and be aware that your own experience or an anecdotal story may not fit a larger pattern. Remember that being an exception does not discredit a rule.

*A Part is Not the Whole:* Remember that your view or experience is your view or experience, a partial opening onto the whole, and not necessarily a general view or experience of everyone; nor are the views or experiences of others necessarily going to match your own. And, just as you cannot represent an entire group of people, nor can anyone else represent a group of people. It is quite okay for everyone to speak their truth and their experience, but working from individual views and experiences to more general ideas or conclusions often requires considerable work.

*Mutual Respect:* A key goal is to respect diverse experiences, viewpoints, approaches, and identities. Even when we disagree, please do not undermine, demean, or marginalize others.

**Academic Integrity:** The University Student Conduct Code defines academic misconduct, which includes unauthorized help on assignments and examinations and the use of sources without acknowledgment. Dishonest behavior includes both "giving" and "taking" of improper assistance on exams, papers, or any other form of attempting to take credit for work that is not your own. If you are uncertain what plagiarism entails, please see the following site: <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/>.

### **Accessible Education**

If you have a condition that inhibits learning or evaluation under customary circumstances, please let me know. In addition, please request a letter from the Accessible Education Center (346-1155, 164 Oregon Hall) that verifies your disability and states the accommodations that I can make. I will make any reasonable adjustments necessary to improve your learning environment.

### **Notice of duty to report**

We support Title IX and have a duty to report relevant information. The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. Any UO employee who becomes aware that such behavior is occurring has a duty to report that information to their supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. The University Health Center and University Counseling and Testing Center can provide assistance and have a greater ability to work confidentially with students.

## **University Health and Counseling Services**

University Health Services help students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. If you need general resources on coping with stress or want to talk with another student who has been in the same place as you, visit the Duck Nest (located in the EMU on the ground floor) and get help from one of the specially trained Peer Wellness Advocates. Find out more at [health.uoregon.edu/ducknest](http://health.uoregon.edu/ducknest).

University Counseling Services (UCS) has a team of dedicated staff members to support you with your concerns, many of whom can provide identity-based support. All clinical services are free and confidential. Find out more at [atcounseling.uoregon.edu](http://atcounseling.uoregon.edu) or by calling 541-346-3227 (anytime UCS is closed, the After-Hours Support and Crisis Line is available by calling this same number).