THE PRESIDENCY

SYLLABUS

The study of the presidency provides an opportunity to:

- examine the ways in which personalities, politics, and governmental institutions affect (1) the process of making of public policy and (2) actual policy outcomes in different issue domains;
- appreciate the ways in which policy making is constrained by characteristics of the political system and actors within it;
- understand the ways in which policy change occurs, often in spite of systemic constraints;
- analyze the interplay of historical, cultural, and political forces;
- assess the relationship between electioneering and governing; and
- begin to understand relationships among the determinants of presidential power, leadership, political support, and policy success.

OBJECTIVES

This seminar is intended to:
focus on the evolving nature of the presidency and its role in the American political system;

explore, in a scholarly manner, a personally interesting (and as yet unresolved) question about the presidency; and

create an occasion for you to deepen and synthesize your understanding of American politics.

WAYS OF REACHING SEMINAR OBJECTIVES

To reach the above objectives, you must:

- Master the assigned reading;\(^1\)
- Assess the logic of the text’s argument and the fit between its propositions and its evidence;\(^2\)
- Try to apply the reading to more recent phenomena;
- Listen closely and interact with one another in a manner that is attentive, respectful, and thoughtful – although it can be more or less supportive, more or less critical;\(^3\)
- Ask questions of one another, to make sure you really understand what is said;\(^4\)
- Critically assess what is said;\(^5\)
- Think about and explore, out loud, the possible implications of what is said;\(^6\)
- Keep track of the flow of a discussion; ideally, you will be able to sum up the discussion;

\(^1\) As evidence of mastery, I will expect you to be able to present, in a faithful and complete way, the argument and evidence of each of the required texts. To do so, you will need to read (and maybe re-read) the text well in advance of the day we discuss it. You also will have to read for comprehension, not just read to read (or skim) the words. Caveat: If you wait to read until the day of the seminar, or even the day before, you will not master the text and that will become painfully obvious.

\(^2\) “Assessing” will require you to reconstruct orally the text’s argument and evidence before you critically comment on it. Caveat: It is facile and fake to take cheap pot shots at a text before you have demonstrated mastery of it.

\(^3\) This kind of active listening requires you to do much more than wait for someone to stop speaking so you can say whatever pops into your head.

\(^4\) These questions are of the sort: “Let me see if I’ve got it …”

\(^5\) This you do by asking: “What’s your evidence?”; “How would you account for these facts … that do not seem inconsistent with what you are saying?”; etc.

\(^6\) You “explore” by asking questions of the sort: “If what you say is true, would you then expect …?”
• Recognize gaps and anomalies in the literature; i.e. incomplete explanations and phenomena that don’t fit or are inconsistent with commonly accepted interpretations; and
• By able to design and carry out, in a manner you find personally meaningful, research that incorporates and builds on relevant seminar reading, elaborates previous research, closes gaps in knowledge and/or explains inconsistencies or anomalies (observations that seem at odds with theoretical expectations).\(^7\)

**REQUIRED READING** (Listed in the order in which they will be discussed.)


\(^7\) For an elaboration of some of these points, see Martin Landau, “Due Process of Inquiry”. [ERes]
ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND REQUIRED READING

Members of this seminar sometimes flounder in a sea of abstractions, since they lack a detailed historical understanding of modern presidents, their policies, and their times.

In an attempt to keep grounded the discussion of the required main texts, I’m requiring each currently enrolled student to pick one of the following additional books, read it carefully before the start of the spring semester, and be prepared to report on it in the first session of class.

You will be asked to report during the first (extra long) meeting of the seminar, on Tuesday, Feb. 5. (7-10 pm). For this first session, we will meet at my home, 294 Forest Street. (Be on time, please.)

Thirty minutes will be set aside for each book. The two persons responsible for a particular book should work together to plan their presentation.

The purpose of each presentation is to convey an accurate understanding of the facts of a particular presidency, with an emphasis on the interplay among the politics, the policies, and the historical context of the president’s term(s). (You may find it helpful to prepare and to be prepared to distribute, at your meeting, a timeline of significant events.)

This is a graded exercise; a satisfactory grade is required to continue in the seminar.

Assignments are as follows:

To be discussed in the following, chronological order:

1. Doris Kearns Goodwin, Team of Rivals.
a. Rayla Hylbom  
b. Matthew Benenson  
a. Philip Reisen  
b. _______________  
a. Kris Fraser  
b. Gracy Amber  
a. Mariah Volk  
b. Ashley Docherty  
a. Josh Cartee  
b. Sarah Feigelson  
a. Ilyssa Meyer  
b. Eric Fischer  

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS (EVALUATIVE WEIGHT)**

- Class participation, including presentation of your research (1/2 your grade). Note: Excellent participation is described above, under **WAYS OF REACHING SEMINAR OBJECTIVES**.  
- Seminar research paper (1/2 your grade)  
- Attending a meeting with Ms. Mitchell, for her presentation on research materials.  
- **EARLY DEADLINES:**  
  1. Two copies of a short, typed statement of at least three possible research questions is due, in class, on Tuesday,  

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8 My travel plans do not permit discretionary incompletes.
Feb. 12. For comments and a listing of suggested research questions, see below.

2. Two copies of your final research question are due, in class, on Tuesday, Feb. 19. You are encouraged to consult, individually, with me before Feb. 19.

SCHEDULE/TOPIC/ASSIGNMENTS [The following schedule may be adjusted to accommodate a presentation by Ms. Mitchell.]

Week 1 (Feb. 5), 7-10 pm, 284 Forest Street

- Presentations on background reading (see above)
- Regarding each week’s discussion of the required text:
  1. Mastery of the text is required.
  2. To master the text, you must begin studying it well in advance of the scheduled session.
  3. Failure to demonstrate mastery will be obvious and graded harshly.

Week 2 (Feb. 12): The modern presidency: The classical view

- NOTE: Your list of possible research questions is due today.
- Reading Assignment: Neustadt
  - In preparation for each week’s discussion of a text, review and use the above “WAYS OF REACHING SEMINAR OBJECTIVES”
  - Discussion Questions: (For this and every discussion of a required text)
    1. What is the thesis of the text?
    2. What is the author’s supportive evidence?
    3. What is your assessment/critique of the thesis, the argument and evidence behind it, and its implications?
4. What’s the possible relevance of the text for your research question? For others’ research questions?
5. Did you demonstrate mastery of the text? (The ADD/DROP deadline is tomorrow.)

Week 3 (Feb. 19): The president within the political system

Reading Assignment: Jones
- In preparation for each week’s discussion of a text, review and use the above “WAYS OF REACHING SEMINAR OBJECTIVES”

Discussion Questions: See Week 2, above, Questions 1-4
Final Research Question Due
Sign up for a presentation date (see below).

Week 4 (Feb. 26): The evolving presidency

Reading Assignment: Lowi
- In preparation for each week’s discussion of a text, review and use the above “WAYS OF REACHING SEMINAR OBJECTIVES”

Discussion Questions: See Week 2, above, Questions 1-4

Week 5 (March 5): The isolated presidency

Reading Assignment: Burns
- In preparation for each week’s discussion of a text, review and use the above “WAYS OF REACHING SEMINAR OBJECTIVES”

Discussion Questions: See Week 2, above, Questions 1-4

Week 6 (March 12): The presidency in political time

Reading Assignment: Skowronek
• In preparation for each week’s discussion of a text, review and use the above “WAYS OF REACHING SEMINAR OBJECTIVES”

Discussion Questions: See Week 2, above, Questions 1-4

Week 7 (March 19): Open

SPRING BREAK

Week 8 (April 2): Presentations begin this week.

Sign up:

_______________________________________________

See below, the NOTE: “What makes for a good presentation”?

Week 9 (April 9): Presentations (cont.)

Sign up:

_______________________________________________

Week 10 (April 16): Presentations (cont.)

Sign up:

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Week 11 (April 23): Presentations (cont.)
Sign up:

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Week 12 (April 30): Presentations (cont.)

Sign up:

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Week 13 (May 7): Presentations (cont.) and Wrap Up

Sign up (Only one):

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COMMENTS ON RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

You should think of the presentation of your research as a “workshop”. Use this opportunity to think out loud in a manner that recovers something of your “logic-in-use”; i.e. the actual and probably not very orderly evolution of your thinking about the research. Moreover …

1. The biggest sin is to be boring. Caveat: Do not read anything aloud.
2. The second biggest sin to b--- s---; this is no time to make it up or vent your personal feelings in the absence of logic and evidence.
3. You must engage the members of the seminar in your research process. To do so, make sure they understand the question (What is it you’re trying to figure out?) and, from
time to time, come back to it, reminding them what you’re trying to do. The implication of this, for the non-presenters, is that you should be actively engaged, by asking questions and by making comments: that also counts heavily towards your participation grade.

4. To engage others in the research process, realize that you’re trying to tell them how you actually went about looking for an answer to your research question. This, what you actually did (are doing), is called your logic-in-use, as opposed to a reconstructed logic (a more formal, retrospective statement of the research process, of the sort that appears in published research accounts).

5. It is understood that your presentation is of research-in-progress. Since they occur at different times in the semester, presentations and the class interactions that accompany them will differ in a number of ways:

   a. If you’re presenting early, I expect all members of the seminar will be very active, joining in and facilitating the discussion. Presenters going early also should focus on the research question:

      i. What is it?
      ii. Are there a number of variations of it?
      iii. How did you come to these? I.e., what were you thinking?
      iv. Why do you want to know?
      v. What is already known? I.e., what is the state of the literature? In what ways have other researchers already narrowed the research question by what they’ve found out? What does the seminar’s required reading contribute to a (partial) answer of the research question?

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9 Both “logics”, i.e. ways of reasoning, are, strictly speaking reconstructed. In conveying a logic-in-use, you, however, try to stay more faithful to what you actually did. (To capture this, you will find it helpful to keep a journal or a research log, as a laboratory scientist would.) See, for example, Abraham Kaplan, The Conduct of Inquiry.
vi. What to you hypothesize (i.e., guess) the answer to be?

vii. Is there a proposition? I.e., a statement of a relationship you expect to observe?

viii. Why do you think that?

ix. If you’re right, so what? I.e., what would that teach us about the presidency? The American political system?

x. And if you’re wrong?

xi. So, tell me again, what’s the research question? I.e., what do you really want to know?

xii. How do you propose to find out? I.e., what research activities are you going to engage it? Where are you going to look?

• At this point, seminar members may be especially helpful in brainstorming possible ways of going about the research process.

xiii. What will you take as evidence? I.e., any proposition you have is a statement of the relationship between two or more concepts. E.g., Wartime presidents are unbeatable. In this instance, what “facts” (empirical indicators) are you going to use to signal that someone is a wartime president? An unbeatable one?

• Here again, the other members of the seminar should be very active, suggesting what they would take as supporting and non-supporting evidence.

b. If you’re presenting later, you will move through the above steps more quickly (with little or no brainstorming) and instead focus on:

i. Stating the hypotheses you tested;

ii. Describing what you found (and how you found it);
iii. Leading a discussion that tries to interpret what you found;
iv. Drawing inferences from the evidence; and
v. Making and discussing conclusions about your study.
vi. Speculating about the broader significance of what you found; i.e., what does it suggest about the presidency and the American political system?

WRITTEN WORK

All written work that is turned in must be:

1. Double-spaced;
2. Left-justified;
3. Printed in dark ink;
4. One side only of the page;
5. Securely fastened,¹⁰ and
6. Due on the last legal day for turning in written work.

CLASS RULES

The quality of this class will depend, in part, on everyone following class rules. These include:

1. Show up; “nearly perfect”¹¹ class attendance is required.
2. Come on time; late arrival is not permitted.¹²
3. No in class use of laptops; they are isolating and sometimes disruptive.

¹⁰ As a practical matter, securely fastened means a staple or an alligator clip. It’s also a good idea to put, on every page, your name and a page number.
¹¹ “Nearly perfect” means you attend all but one class, unless you’re hospitalized (and can produce your discharge papers). If you’re sick and “contaminating” (sneezing, coughing, etc.), wear a mask.
¹² If you’re late, as defined by my watch and as signaled by the closed door, do not even attempt to enter. The resulting non-attendance will count against your one permitted absence.
4. No feet on the table; it’s disruptively rude and sometimes distractingly gross.

All these class rules are mandatory; that is, not following any of them will result in your not passing this course.

EMAIL

To reduce the risk of computer viruses, I do not open email from senders I do not recognize. If you want me to read your email, use your (nonfunky) OC email name.
Possible Research Questions (Suggestions only)

Advice:
1. Success in carrying out the research project requires that you start early.
2. Procrastinating, while searching for the perfect research question, will lead to disaster.
   a. There is no such thing as a perfect question.
   b. All initial questions go through many changes, once you begin your research.
   c. You are intelligent and resourceful enough to start with almost any question and turn it into one that is both personally and academically interesting.
3. To speed you on your way, here is a suggested listing of possible research questions. (You can just pick one, use them to brainstorm about others, or find your own.)
4. Additional notes:
   a. On the list of (at least 3) possible research questions, provide only one short sentence for each question.
   b. A research question is a question, not a topic.
   c. Your actual research should be guided by your personal interests and well-informed by both the seminar’s required reading and by your original research; your research paper must reflect this.
   d. The following research questions have a contemporary bias. You, of course, might prefer a more historical research question.)

Possible Questions:

1. Of what political or governmental relevance, if any, was the 2012 presidential election campaign?

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13 A research question is like greatness.
2. Is President Obama acting as though he is over-mandated (or mis-mandated). And, if so, with what likely result?
3. Is President Obama stuck in the electioneering process, at the expense of governance?
4. Is there any evidence that President Obama is doing a better job of keeping mobilized his base (better than he did in 2009), and, if he is, what difference might it make?
5. What has President Obama apparently learned (or failed to learn) from previous presidents?
6. Is Jones wrong? That is, to be successful, must President Obama cooperate with Congress?
7. If Neustadt is correct, namely that presidential power is the power to persuade, does President Obama have any? That is, who has he persuaded, and of what? (Or failed to persuade?)
8. How much of the Democratic congressional loss of 2010 was due to President Obama?
9. Does President Obama have good political instincts? (Defined as? Evidence of?) Exception/Anomalous missteps? How do you account for? (As good as FDR’s?)
10. What makes for a successful presidency? A failed one? How would characterize the Obama presidency?
11. Do the sources of a less than successful presidency lie outside or within the office: outside (aspects of the broader political system) or within, (aspects of the occupant, and the organization of the Office of the President)?
12. Has Obama done just about as well as could be expected, given the constraints on the modern day presidency?
13. Did Obama “run alone” in 2012, and, if so, with what likely effects for the last four years of his presidency?
14. Has President Obama found is his “voice”? And, is “voice” as important as it used to be?
15. In his first administration, did Obama “sell out” to Wall Street?
16. Compare the presidencies of Bush I and Obama. (Will Obama suffer the same electoral fate, for similar reasons?)

17. Compare the first term of the Obama presidency with the first (or second) term of FDR.

18. Has the Obama White House abandoned Keynesian economics? (That is, shouldn’t we be spending more money, not trying to reduce the deficit?) If so, when did he abandon them and why?

(January, 2013)