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;
- 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.¹

WAYS OF REACHING SEMINAR OBJECTIVES

To reach the above objectives, you must:

- Master the assigned reading;²

¹ This seminar is not a soap box for praising or damning any President.
² 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.
• Assess the logic of the text’s argument and the fit between its propositions and its evidence;³
• 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;⁴
• Ask questions of one another, to make sure you really understand what is said;⁵
• Critically assess what is said;⁶
• Think about and explore, out loud, the possible implications of what is said;⁷
• Keep track of the flow of a discussion; ideally, you will be able to sum up the discussion;
• 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, takes into account previous research, closes gaps in knowledge and/or explains inconsistencies or anomalies (observations that seem at odds with theoretical expectations).⁸

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


³ “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.
⁴ 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.
⁵ These questions are of the sort: “Let me see if I’ve got it …”
⁶ 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.
⁷ You “explore” by asking questions of the sort: “If what you say is true, would you then expect …?”
⁸ For an elaboration of some of these points, see Martin Landau, “Due Process of Inquiry”. [ERes]

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS (EVALUATIVE WEIGHTS)** 9
- 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)\(^{10}\)
- Attending a meeting with Ms. Mitchell, for her presentation on research materials.

**SCHEDULE/TOPIC/ASSIGNMENTS**

**Week 1 (Feb. 4)**
- Introductions
- Discussion of interesting and significant questions
  - NOTE: As previously assigned via email …
  - ▪ Come to this meeting with 2 or 3 questions about the Obama presidency. These questions should be:
    - Brief
    - “Interesting”, in the sense that you do not know the answer
    - Personally interesting (You care about the answer)
    - And “significant”, in the sense that the answer might suggest something important about the presidency and the American political system.
- Comments on the quality of seminar discussions: Instructor and student expectations
- Instructor presentation. The required nature of the research project and seminar paper: The due process of inquiry. (After class, study closely the article by Martin Landau; it describes the process you must use to conduct and present your research.)

**HARK: NOTE DIFFERENT MEETING PLACE FOR NEXT WEEK (ONLY)**

**Week 2 (Feb. 11): Research Sources**

**NOTE: This required meeting will take place in Mudd 305.** In this meeting, Megan Mitchell, a Reference and Instruction Librarian, will introduce various research sources and illustrate their use.
- Research questions
  - ▪ Bring to this meeting 1 or 2 possible research questions (for some suggestions, see below).

\(^9\) My travel plans do not permit discretionary incompletes.
\(^{10}\) You can improve your paper and your grade if you write in a manner that communicates what you really mean. To do so, avoid “commonly misused words”; see Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style* @ http://www.bartleby.com/141/strunk3.html
• NOTES:
  • A research question is a question, not a topic.
  • After a brief discussion, you will be committed to a research question.
• Sign up for presentation dates

Week 3 (Feb. 18): The modern presidency: The classical view

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

Week 4 (Feb. 25): 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 3, above, Questions 1-4

Week 5 (March 4): 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 3, above, Questions 1-4

Week 6 (March 11): 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 3, above, Questions 1-4

Week 7 (March 18): 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

SPRING BREAK

Week 8 (April 1): Presentations begin this week.

Sign up:

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

Week 9 (April 8): Presentations (cont.)

Sign up:

Week 10 (April 15): Presentations (cont.)

Sign up:

Week 11 (April 22): Presentations (cont.)

Sign up:

Week 12 (April 29): Presentations (cont.)

Sign up:

Week 13 (May 6): Presentations (cont.) and Wrap Up

Sign up (Only one):

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 especially active, joining in and facilitating the discussion.
   b. All presenters must follow the required format of the research paper. (For the format, see below.)

WRITTEN WORK

All written work that is turned in must be:

1. Emailed to me as a Word doc attachment;
2. Double-spaced;
3. Left-justified; and
4. 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”12 class attendance is required.

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11 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.
12 “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.
2. Come on time; late arrival is not permitted.\textsuperscript{13}
3. No in class use of laptops; they are isolating and sometimes disruptive.
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.

\textsuperscript{13} 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.
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 listing of possible research questions. (You can just pick one, use them to brainstorm about others, or, even better, find your own.)
4. Additional notes:
   a. A research question is a question, not a topic (noun).
   b. Your research should be guided by your personal interests and well informed by both the seminar’s required reading and by your additional reading; your research presentation and paper must reflect this.
   c. The following research questions have a contemporary bias. You, of course, might prefer a more historical research question.

Possible Questions:

1. Compare President Obama’s ability to mobilize public support with that of Theodore Roosevelt, as described in Doris Kearns Goodwin’s, The Bully Pulpit.
2. How might it be possible the President Obama didn’t know about so many of the things that blew up?
3. Has Obama aggrandized the power of the presidency, continuing the trend he decried?
4. To what extent has Obama succeeded or failed to deliver on his campaign promises?
5. Is Obama another Teflon president? If so why? (And so what?)
6. Is Obama isolated? As much as Nixon? If so why? (And so what?)
7. Is Obama likely to be as much a failure as most 2nd term presidents? And, in general, why do 2nd term presidents tend to fair so poorly?
8. Of what political or governmental relevance, if any, was the 2012 presidential election campaign?
9. Is President Obama acting as though he is over-mandated (or mis-mandated). And, if so, with what likely result?
10. Is President Obama stuck in the electioneering process, at the expense of governance?
11. Has the Obama presidency been one of “fits-and-starts”: i.e. grand announcements with little effective follow-through (on gun control, Syria, Syria, Syria, Syria, Syria).

14 A research question is like greatness … (To be elaborated)
Mubarak, Gaddafi, global warming, income inequality, NSA, the NSA fix, etc.)?
And, if so, with what ramifications for the presidency?
12. Is there any evidence that President Obama is doing a better, or worse, job of keeping mobilized his base (better than he did in 2009), and, if he is, what difference might it make?
13. What has President Obama apparently learned (or failed to learn) from previous presidents?
14. Is Jones wrong? That is, to be successful, must President Obama cooperate with Congress?
15. 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?)
16. How much of the Democratic congressional loss of 2010 was due to President Obama?
17. Does President Obama have good political instincts? (Defined as? Evidence of?) Exception/Anomalous missteps? How do you account for? (As good as FDR’s?)
18. What makes for a successful presidency? A failed one? How would characterize the Obama presidency?
19. 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)?
20. Has Obama done just about as well as could be expected, given the constraints on the modern day presidency?
21. Did Obama “run alone” in 2012, and, if so, with what likely effects for the last four years of his presidency?
22. Has President Obama found is his “voice”? And, is “voice” as important as it used to be?
23. In his first administration, did Obama “sell out” to Wall Street?
24. Compare the first term of the Obama presidency with the first (or second) term of FDR.
NOTES:

• You must use this format.
• Include the topics below (the ones in bold type), numbered 1-9 as A and B level headings.

1. **The main research question**: What is it you want to know?
   • Comments
     o It’s a question.
     o It’s a question about variation: E.g. Why are some presidents more successful than others?
     o Your task: Explain the variation.

2. **The state of the literature**
   a. What is already known? I.e., What (probably partial) answers have already been found?
      i. To answer this question, summarize the existing literature, with full and complete citations.
      ii. During the in-class presentation, all members of the seminar are expected to draw on the required reading. I.e.:
          1. What does Neustadt contribute to an understanding of the main research question?
          2. What does Jones contribute …
          3. Etc.
   b. What is not yet known?
   c. Briefly list the unanswered (other possible) questions that need to be answered by research.

3. **Model: Key variables**
   a. Your model is an abstract simplification of that which you want to explain; it consists of:
      i. **The dependent variable.** An outcome: i.e. a dependent variable. (It varies; that’s what you want to explain. For example, some presidential mistakes evolve into a presidential crisis; others don’t. Why?)
      ii. **The independent variables.** The factors that might explain the variation; i.e. the independent variables that you believe (suspect) account for the variation. For example:
          ▪ The effectiveness of White House damage control efforts
          ▪ The discrepancy between the mistake and previous expectations created by the President
          ▪ New, intervening events that deflect public attention
      iii. **The theory.** What you posit to be the relationships among the variables; i.e. your *theory* of the joint or interactive effect of the independent variables (on the dependent variable). This theory should include:
          1. Statements of the expected relationships; and
2. An explanation of why those relationships should hold.
   NOTE:
   • Beware of spurious relationships; i.e. those you observe but which are the result of the operation of another variable, one you did not include in your model. (E.g., The more I go to my barber, the less hair I have.)

4. Empirical Referents: I.e., what you will take to be an indication or reflection of each of the variables.
   NOTES:
   • For each of the variables, describe what you hope to find, out there in observable, empirical reality, as evidence of the presence of the variable.
   • In doing this, you basically are answering the question: If this variable (e.g. presidential damage control) were present, how would I (or anyone) know it?
   • Imagining and finding appropriate empirical referents is always somewhat sketchy, and people will often disagree about what is an appropriate bit of evidence.

5. Evidence: Simply, when you went to look for empirical evidence of the existence and operation of your variables, what did you find?

6. Analysis
   a. What do you make of your evidence?
   b. In what ways, and to what extent, does it answer your research question?
   c. In what ways, and to what extent, does it fail to answer your research question?

7. Conclusions and implications
   a. On the basis of your research and the required reading, what do you now conclude about your dependent variable and that which might account for its variation?
   b. On the basis of your research and the required reading, what do you now conclude about the presidency and the American political system?

8. References (full and complete citations of all works referenced in the body of the paper).

9. Honor Pledge