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:

1. Master the assigned reading;²
2. Assess the logic of the text’s argument and the fit between its propositions and its evidence;³
3. Try to apply the reading to more recent phenomena;
4. 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
5. Ask questions of one another, to make sure you really understand what is said;⁵
6. Critically assess what is said;⁶
7. Think about and explore, out loud, the possible implications of what is said;⁷
8. Keep track of the flow of a discussion; ideally, you will be able to sum up the discussion;
9. 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
10. 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

¹This seminar is not a soapbox for praising or damning any President.
²As 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.
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.
⁴This 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.
⁵These questions are of the sort: “Let me see if I’ve got it ...”
⁶This 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.
⁷You “explore” by asking questions of the sort: “If what you say is true, would you then expect ...?”
⁸For an elaboration of some of these points, see Martin Landau, “Due Process of Inquiry”. [ERes]
REQUIRED READING (Listed in the order in which they will be discussed.)

1. Martin Landau, “The due process of inquiry”. Posted on Blackboard (Bb)
2. George Orwell, “Politics and the English language”. Posted on Blackboard (Bb)

RECOMMENDED READING

- Stephen Hess, The Professor and the President. (The influence of Daniel Patrick Moynihan on Richard Nixon)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS (EVALUATIVE WEIGHTS) 9

To receive a passing grade, all of the following are required:

- Class participation, including presentation of your research (1/2 your grade).
  Notes: Under WAYS OF REACHING SEMINAR OBJECTIVES (above), Items 1-10. In particular, note that items 4-6 are interactive. Your failure to interact with your peers in a meaningful way will result in a failing grade.
- Seminar research paper (1/2 your grade) 10
- Attending a meeting with Ms. Mitchell, for her presentation on research materials.

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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
SCHEDULE/TOPIC/ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1 (Feb. 3)
- Introductions
- Brainstorming: Interesting and significant research questions
  - NOTE: As previously assigned via email …
    - Come to this meeting with 2 or 3 questions about the Obama presidency. These research 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.)
- Instructor mini-sermon: Read and follow Orwell’s advice in “Politics and the English language”.

Week 2 (Feb. 10): The modern presidency: The classical view
- 1st 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? (NOTE: To offer your assessment before you demonstrate mastery, is facile and cheap.)
    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?
- 2nd Reading Assignment: Orwell (Also for the 2nd seminar meeting)
  - Discussion questions:
    1. What’s wrong with slovenly writing?
    2. What are you going to do to avoid it?

- HARK: NOTE DIFFERENT MEETING PLACE FOR NEXT WEEK (Week 3) ONLY
Week 3 (Feb. 17): Research Sources

NOTE: This required meeting will take place in Mudd 113. 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 two printed copies of 1 or 2 possible research questions (for some suggestions, see below).
    - NOTES:
      - A research question is a question, not a topic.
      - After a brief discussion, you will be committed AT THIS MEETING ON FEB. 17 to a research question.

- Sign up for presentation dates

Week 4 (Feb. 24): The president within the political system

*Reading Assignment: Jones*

- NOTE: The *Jones* text is long and detailed; you will have to spend more time with it than you think.
- 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 3): 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 10): 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 17): 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 (March 31): Presentations begin this week.

Sign up:

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

Week 9 (April 7): Presentations (cont.)

Sign up:

____________________________________________________

Week 10 (April 14): Presentations (cont.)

Sign up:

____________________________________________________

Week 11 (April 21): Presentations (cont.)

Sign up:

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Week 12 (April 28): Presentations (cont.)

Sign up:

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Week 13 (May 5): Presentations (cont.) and Wrap Up

Sign up:

____________________________________________________
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:

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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.
1. Show up; “nearly perfect”\(^{12}\) class attendance is required.
2. Come on time; late arrival is not permitted.\(^{13}\)
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.

(January, 2015)

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\(^{12}\) “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” (sneeze, cough, etc.), wear a mask.

\(^{13}\) If you’re late, as defined by my watch and as signaled by the closed door, do not attempt to enter. The resulting non-attendance will count against your one permitted absence.