POSC 423 – Presidents and the Presidency  
(Fall 2017 Course Description)

The broad goal of this course is to provide an introduction to the study of the American presidency. Beyond this, the course has four additional goals. The first is to introduce students broadly to the presidency as an institution, its history, its design, how it operates, and how it interacts with the other branches in the U.S. separation of powers system. Some questions the course will address are: What are the president’s constitutional powers? How does the president influence the legislature? What is the president’s role in foreign policy and domestic policy? How does the president attempt to manage and control his appointees?

The second goal of the course is for students to learn about the electoral constraints on presidents. How are presidents elected and what role does the unique American system of electing presidents play in decisions made while running for office and once elected to office? Do actions of modern presidents differ in the first versus second terms? How do the primary/caucus nomination process and the general election process affect presidential election outcomes? We will begin the course focusing on the electoral roots of the modern presidency to answer these questions.

The third goal of the course is to compel students to think critically about the presidency as an institution, and to allow students to sharpen their critical-thinking skills. While you will learn about the presidency, a goal of this course is to learn how to think critically and analyze. Students should know more about the presidency than a person who reads the New York Times or the L.A. Times every day. While I encourage each student to read reputable national or international newspapers/news sources during the semester, students should be able to go beyond the news to analyze, critique, and make educated predictions by the end of the class. Students should be able to analyze presidential activities and understand why presidents make the choices they do given the constraints of other branches of government and public opinion.

The final goal of the course is to motivate further study of the presidency beyond what is offered in this course. Students are encouraged to read outside the course and approach me for additional suggestions. I hope you will find the presidency as interesting as I do and want to investigate it further.