Political Science 423: Presidents and the Presidency
Fall 2017
Class meets in VKC 102
Prof. Christian Grose

T-Th 8:00am-9:20am
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Office Hours: Tuesdays 9:30am-10:45am
(office hours are drop-in, no appt. needed)

Course Description, Goals, and Objectives:

This semester is an amazing time in U.S. history to learn about presidents and the presidency. This course focuses on the U.S. presidency. In it, you will learn how to analyze the behavior, incentives, and actions of presidents and other executive branch officials. We will examine theories and empirical examples of executive branch decision-making and the institution of the presidency. In addition, we will study the electoral roots that underlie presidential actions. A basic understanding of American politics is encouraged for this course.

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 latter portion of the course will deal with these issues and questions.

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, to learn about individual presidents (especially in the contemporary era) 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 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.
**My role as an instructor:** Beyond these aforementioned goals, I also want to help you think critically about the topic and to learn the subject matter. To do this, I intend to explain as clearly as possible difficult concepts, methods, or subjects that come up during the course. If you have any trouble following or comprehending the readings or the lectures, please ask me in class or during office hours. My intention is to be accessible to my students to address any questions or concerns about the class materials you may have. In terms of evaluation, I also intend to evaluate your work fairly. While this course will be academically rigorous and challenging, I hope that you will have learned quite a bit by the end of the course and that your interest in the subject of the presidency and in political science has been piqued.

**Required Readings:** There are a number of articles and readings that are available by web link, or through JSTOR or other academic journal sources. There are also book-length texts required for this course. They are not at the bookstore, but can be purchased through numerous online sources (e.g., Amazon.com, Powells.com, etc.). There is so much interest in the U.S. presidency right now, and with the election of Donald Trump, there are a significant number of new readings I have added to the syllabus since I last taught the course. I reserve the right to change, delete, or add readings to the syllabus; and/or make any other changes to the syllabus as needed.

Books to purchase for the course:


In addition to these texts, we will also read many other articles. These articles are available at the web links listed in the syllabus on the date we will discuss the articles, are available via JSTOR or other sources through the USC library, or will be made available on reserve on blackboard. Some lectures will also include my summaries of political science and academic research on the executive branch and political institutions above and beyond the readings.

**Class Schedule:**

**Tues. 8/22**

Introduction and Course Overview
Assignment for Tuesday: Rate President Trump based on first 200+ days relative to other presidents: Where does he rank 1 through 45? Write and explain your answer in one paragraph in less than one page.

**Th. 8/24**

1-paragraph rating the current president historically due in class.
https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixedgov/2015/02/13/measuring-obama-against-the-great-presidents/
Excerpt on PBS Frontline (original from *Political Science Quarterly*):
Part I. The Electoral Foundations of the Modern Presidency

Tues. 8/29 Discussion of Constitution (provisions relating to executive), powers of presidency, basics of electoral college


“What is the Electoral College?” U.S. National Archives. hives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/about.html


Th. 8/31 Electoral College continued

Tues. 9/5 Contextualizing the 2016 presidential general election


To watch clips in class: PBS Frontline, “The Choice 2016.” Documentary. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7uScWHcTzk [1 hour and 54 minutes].


Apple, R.W. “The 1992 campaign; Democrats; Clinton the Front-Runner is Also the Prey as the First Primary Nears.” New York Times, February 8.


In class: Selection of 16 for ’16 PBS: Buchanan and Dean:

Th. 9/14

Presidential Elections – general elections


Assignment for 9/14: Data analysis of presidential elections using CCES survey data; or precinct data in state.

Tues. 9/19

Joshua Green, Devil’s Bargain, Ch. 1-2

Thurs. 9/21

Joshua Green, Devil’s Bargain, Ch. 5-6 [skip or skim Ch. 3-4]

Tues. 9/26

Joshua Green, Devil’s Bargain, Ch. 7-8

Thurs. 9/28

Joshua Green, Devil’s Bargain, Ch. 9-11


Tues. 10/3

Joshua Green, Devil’s Bargain, Ch. 9-11 continued

Part II. The Institution of the Presidency and Governance

Thurs. 10/5
Pika, Maltese, and Rudalevige, Ch. 6, “Executive Politics,” available on Blackboard. In *The Politics of the Presidency*.

Tues. 10/10
Moe and Howell, “Unilateral Action and Presidential Power: A Theory.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*


Thurs. 10/12
President scandals

“Worse than Watergate? The Ultimate White House Scandal Matrix.”
http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/05/white-house-scandal-matrix/

http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/06/history-campaign-politics-zachary-taylor-killed-whigs-political-party-213935

Tues. 10/17
Constraints on the president: impeachment

Julia Azari, “Presidential Impeachments are about Politics, Not Law.”

http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1532673X05282848

Thurs. 10/19
Midterm exam

Tues. 10/24
Discussion of final paper assignment – Two choices: (1) Executive branch financial holdings and policy choices; or (2) Can Trump politically control his appointees?

Loyalty-competence tradeoff
http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2001/03/spring-governance-edwards


Th. 10/26 Loyalty-competence tradeoff in presidential appointments continued


Tues. 10/31 Presidential approval and success in Congress

https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-essence-of-presidential-leadership


Begin: Moe and Howell, 2016, Relic: How Our Constitution, Introduction Ch. 1

Th. 11/2 Moe and Howell, 2016, Relic: How Our Constitution, Introduction & Ch. 1

Tues. 11/7 Moe and Howell, 2016, Relic: How Our Constitution, Ch. 2

Th. 11/9 Moe and Howell, 2016, Relic: How Our Constitution, Ch. 3

Tues. 11/14 Moe and Howell, 2016, Relic: How Our Constitution, Ch. 4

Th. 11/16 Midterm 2 in class

Tues. 11/21 Student presentations on final paper
Th. 11/23  No class - Thanksgiving
Tues. 11/28  Student presentations on final paper
Th. 11/30  Last day of class. Student presentations on final paper. **Final papers due in class, or can be turned in before class period. (5-8 pages of text double-spaced; no more than 10 pages of text not including bibliography)**

**Grading and Evaluation:**

Your grade will be determined as follows

Midterm 1 27%
Midterm 2 30%
Final paper 30%
Class participation & group presentation 10%
Final class presentation 3%

There will be two exams (see dates on course schedule above). The first midterm will include all readings and lectures until that date. The second midterm will include all readings, lectures, and material covered after the first midterm through the date of the second midterm. There is no final exam. Both midterms will be taken in the class and must be completed during the regularly scheduled class time. Anyone missing class the day the midterm is administered will receive a grade of F on the written midterm unless you notify me that you will be absent in the first two weeks of class. The midterm exams may be difficult and you will need to prepare extensively. The final paper will be about the last set of readings and will be 5-8 pages of text in length (8 page limit does not include bibliographic citations) and should be double-spaced. It is due in class on the last day of class.

Participation and discussion in class is also a component of the “Class Participation” portion of the grade. Participation generally is measured as speaking in class, discussing the material, and responding to fellow students during discussion. Quality as well as quantity of discussion and participation will be considered. Also, an indication that you are regularly keeping up with the readings (based on class discussion) will be crucial to your participation grade. Early in the semester when I may not have yet learned your name, please use your name when you raise your hand to speak in class so I can give you credit for participation.

There will also be group presentations held throughout the semester to coincide with one of the readings. These presentations should be 15 minutes or less in total. Around the first or second week of class, I will divide the class into groups of students, and you will be responsible for group presentations on the readings for that day. Specifically, I expect you to summarize the author’s argument; present evidence for the author’s argument; present criticisms or critiques of the reading; and come up with questions raised in the readings that remain unanswered or only partially answered. In addition to the group presentation, there will be an individual presentation from each student on their final paper in the last 2 weeks of the semester. I will discuss the presentations (both group and final individual presentation) in class in greater detail. The group presentation is part of your participation grade, and the individual final presentation is also part of your final grade.
By including these multiple methods of evaluation (midterms, final paper, participation), your final grade will be determined by demonstrating proficiency in a variety of areas. I think multiple evaluation methods are fairer than simply one big paper or exam.

Finally, I want to note that plagiarism is unacceptable and can result in serious penalties (the first of which will be a case taken to the academic honesty review board, which typically results in an F in the entire class, or worse). If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the USC student affairs web site that details plagiarism: https://dornsife.usc.edu/usc-policies/#plagiarism. Please feel free to ask me as well if you have any questions or concerns. Copying text directly from any source without quotations is one form of plagiarism, as is writing similarly-phrased words and sentences without attribution. Again, please consult the above link for a very detailed description of the types of plagiarism (all of which are unacceptable).

How to Reach Me: My office hours for this term will be held in my office in VonKleinSmid Center 230A from 9:30am-10:45am on Tuesdays. These office hours are drop-in and first-come, first-serve, no appointment needed. If you cannot make office hours, the best way to contact me is by email, which is cgrose@usc.edu. While I regularly respond to email, keep in mind it may take me 1-2 days to get back to you depending on when you email me (e.g., if you email me Friday afternoon, I might not get back to you until Monday; though often times I will be able to respond much more quickly during the week).