Statement about the Course

The American presidency has historically been one of the most popular courses in political science departments across the United States, as well as in many foreign countries. Why? The reason is because the study of the American presidency focuses on the most powerful leader in the world. Decisions by the American president always receive worldwide attention because his decisions necessarily impact other governments. This makes the study of the American president both important and exciting. Because the American president receives so much news coverage, most students know a lot about the American presidency before they enter my class. Consequently, when I teach this course I assume that students already know quite a bit about the presidency, so this course is taught at an advanced level. This course covers about everything pertaining to the presidency from the president as commander-in-chief to presidential personality types to why, for example, Obama (the thin man) likes to eat hamburgers and pizza in public. To really understand the presidency, nothing is too big or too little to discuss.

In this class we will discuss and debate many things pertaining to the presidency. However, my experience has been that such can trigger some angry and emotional partisanship. It must be appreciated that we all come from varied backgrounds that shape our political perspective/partisanship. Consequently, some of us are Democrats, Republicans, Independents, or other. I have polled my students in the past and have found that political party preference is pretty evenly split between Democrats and Republicans at SLU. Partisanship can be a good thing because it allows us to question and debate positions on issues, but we must respect the responsible political views held and expressed by everyone in our class. However, to command respect, partisan arguments must be rooted in reasoned positions and facts, not on irrational arguments rooted in closed-minded partisanship and falsehoods.

The following course outline will not be rigidly followed because I have concluded that students show more interest in the subject and learn more about the American presidency if I apply “breaking news” on the American presidency to class discussions. Consequently, you will be held accountable for the chapters on your midterm and final, but I will not cover systematically or comprehensively the contents of each chapter. This will be left up to you. You will be responsible for about the first half of the chapters for the midterm and the last half of the chapters for the final. By the end of the semester class discussions will address the general topics covered in each chapter, but as I said, not systematically.

I will assign many readings from breaking news topics. Some news articles will be only hours old, not years old as is common in textbooks. Students have reported in the past that they like to discuss breaking news topics on the American presidency rather than older materials. An inherent problem with textbooks is that the materials are old and outdated. This presents a serious problem in a course on the American presidency. However, the basics of the American presidency, as covered in textbooks on the presidency, are important, so the “textbook” basics will be covered, but often in the context of current news topics on the presidency. For example, we can put Obama’s struggles with the Republicans in Congress in an historical perspective, learning how past presidents have dealt with the opposition party in Congress, especially as a president faces his party's mid-term elections in the sixth year of his presidency. By analyzing
Obama’s struggles with Congress, we can also learn much about the institutions and processes of the legislative and executive branches.

Since I want to have a lot of class discussions in light of assigned, current articles, it is necessary that you read these articles in advance of the class discussions so you can participate. Informed, lively class discussions are fun and rewarding. To encourage your informed participation, your course grade will be based in part on your participation.

**Course Outline**

I. Introductory Comments  
   A. An Overview  
   B. Perspectives on presidential greatness/weakness

II. The American Presidency  
   A. Origins of the Office of President  
   B. His formal constitutional powers  
   C. His real, informal powers  
   D. Summary

III. Presidential Politics and Elections  
   A. Running for the biggest prize in the world  
   B. Electoral realities pertaining to presidential elections  
   C. The nomination process  
   D. The convention  
   E. The general campaign  
   F. Why third-party candidates can’t win  
   G. Historical trends, election types, etc.  
   H. Summary

IV. The Media, Polls, and the President  
   A. Media politics  
   B. The role of public opinion and polls  
   C. Summary

V. Office of the President  
   A. Administrative structure and process  
   B. Administrative models  
   C. Managerial issues and controversies  
   D. Examples of presidential management styles  
   E. Summary

VI. Key White House Offices  
   A. White House staff  
   B. Comments on key White House officers/officials  
   C. Summary
VII. The Executive Branch
A. The history and development of the 15 Cabinet offices under the President
B. The rest of the Executive Branch and how it is staffed and “controlled” by the President
C. Summary

VIII. Presidential Character and Performance
A. Background
B. Presidential personality types
C. Psychological factors, world views, style and other personal factors influencing presidential performance
D. Further reflections and conclusions
E. Summary

IX. The President v. Congress
A. Overview
B. Constitutional standing before Congress
C. How the President tries to push his legislative agenda
D. Examples of presidential efforts
E. Summary

X. The President and the Judiciary
A. Judicial politics and the appointment process
B. The Supreme Court and presidential politics
C. The Roberts’ nominations
D. Compliance with court decisions
E. Conclusions

XI. Presidential Foreign Policy and National Security
A. The President’s evolving role in foreign affairs
B. Presidential war powers
C. The foreign policy/defense bureaucracy
D. The military industrial complex and wars
E. The Iraq War in historical perspective
F. Fighting terrorism
G. Summary

XII. The President and Domestic Politics
A. Domestic policymaking
B. OMB and the President
C. Domestic Policy Office
D. Agenda setting and strategies
E. Summary

XIII. Abuses of Power and Presidential Scandals
A. History and examples of presidential scandals
B. How scandals have impacted presidential popularity and reputation
C. Future expectations of presidents
D. Summary

Required Readings


Assigned readings from the Internet and emailed articles to you

Grading Policy

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<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-term</td>
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<tr>
<td>Position Paper</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>160</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
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My phone, e-mail, office, and office hours:
314 977-3036 (office)
314 963-0451 (home – call when very important)
E-mail: warrenkf@slu.edu
Office: McGannon Hall, Room 135
Office hours: T/TH, 10:50 - 12:30; you also may try to catch me T/TH afternoons immediately before and after my 12:45 class ending at 2:00, and by special appointment

Attendance Policy

Regular, responsible attendance is expected. Classes should be missed only for very legitimate and compelling reasons. More than five unexcused absences will result in grade penalties. Skipping exams is absolutely forbidden unless a formal written medical excuse is submitted and accepted. Other excuses may be accepted, but you need to inform me. Note: I give a lot of material in my lectures that does not come from the book. I frequently lecture on “breaking news” pertaining to the presidency. Many times I supplement my lectures with handouts (e.g., current articles on the Obama administration). The textbook is a short book that I use to provide the basics on the presidency. For the mid-term and final, you will be responsible for not only book assignments, but also for what is in the handouts and in my lectures. I guarantee that you will not do well if you do not attend class because I intentionally ask a lot of questions on exams that come only from the handouts and class lectures, so please come to class. Also, since 10% of
your grade is based on participation, your final course grade will be affected negatively by skipping class since you obviously cannot participate if you are not in class.

**Academic Honesty Policy**

Students are expected to be honest in their academic work. The University reserves the right to penalize any student whose academic conduct at any time is, in its judgment, detrimental to the University. Such conduct shall include cases of plagiarism, collusion, cheating, giving or receiving or offering or soliciting information in examinations, or the use of previously prepared material in examinations or quizzes. Violations should be reported to me and will be investigated and adjudicated according to the Policy on Academic Honesty of the College of Arts & Sciences. If the charges are found to be true, the student may be liable for academic or disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion from the University.

(See [http://www.slu.edu.colleges/AS/academichonesty.html](http://www.slu.edu.colleges/AS/academichonesty.html))

**Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities need to make arrangements with the Disabilities Coordinator, 977-8885, DuBourg, Room 36. The Americans with Disabilities Act will be honored completely.

https://mail.slu.edu/cgi-bin/webmail.cgi?cmd=item-32&utoken=warrenkf40svd.slu.edu3...

8/24/2007

**Grading Scale**

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<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
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<td>93-100</td>
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<td>A-</td>
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<td>68-70</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>below 60</td>
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**Course Objectives**

Basically, I have a twofold objective in teaching this course. First, I want students to learn about the institution and practices of the American presidency. Secondly, I want students to learn to think critically about the American presidency.

**Modes of Assessment and Skills/Knowledge Being Assessed**

I do not want political science students to just think through “partisan blinders” about, say, how well Obama is performing. I want students to be able to tell me why in a scholarly manner why they would give Obama, say, an “Excellent,” “Good,” “Fair,” or “Poor” job performance rating.
This would require that students know and apply the American governmental system to presidential performance. Student knowledge and critical thinking skills pertaining to the American presidency will be assessed through a midterm and final exam, a position paper, and through their input in class discussions. I will look at not only a student’s factual knowledge of the American presidency subject matter, but how sophisticated their conceptual or critical thinking skills are in addressing the subject matter of this course.

**In-Class Activities**

In-class activities will consist of standard lectures combined with a lot of class discussions on topics related to the American presidency. Students will be expected to keep up with the reading assignments, especially the assigned current articles from the Internet and other articles sent to them via email so they can participate meaningfully in class discussions. Participation will constitute 10% of a student’s final grade in this course.