

# The Presidency and the Executive Branch<sup>1</sup>

## Course Syllabus

### Online Course

GVPT 475 – Summer 2009

University of Maryland, College Park

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*Office Hours:* By appointment, only

Footnotes Café, McKeldin Library

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### Course Description

This course will provide an overview of the concepts, questions and research surrounding the American Presidency. It is designed to acquaint students with the history, design, processes and behavior of America's most visible public official. Hopefully, it will inspire students to continue on to a more in-depth understanding of the chief executive. Specifically, this course focuses on the *academic* and *political science* understanding of the presidency and its place in the larger American system of government. Rather than looking at the president through a short-term lens as is common in America's newspapers and television news networks, this class takes a step back and examines the office more broadly. The first part of the class will look at the design and development of the office. The second part of the class will examine issues of presidential power and success. The third part will examine how the president fits within the larger American political system. The final section of the class will focus on presidential elections.

### Goals

- To acquaint students with the various concepts surrounding the American President.
- To deepen student interest in the study of the Presidency.
- To expose students to the proper forms of presidential research.
- To develop student critical-thinking and analytical tools through class assignments and discussion.

### Required Texts

- Pika, Joseph A., and John A. Maltese. 2008. *The Politics of the Presidency*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. CQ Press. [hereafter *Pika and Maltese*]
- Nelson, Michael. 2005. *The Presidency and the Political System*, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. CQ Press. [hereafter *Nelson*]
- Electronic Reserves [marked *ER*]
- All other materials will be posted on ELMS.

### Assignments and Grading

Discussion Participation:	30%
Written Assignments:	35%
Final Exam:	35%

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<sup>1</sup> The instructor reserves the right to alter this syllabus at any time.

### **Day-to-Day Functioning of the Class**

This is an online course, and as such will have to operate a little differently than a regular classroom course. In the class schedule below I have outlined the class and a schedule of readings, discussion questions, and written assignments. Students are expected to have finished the readings and finished discussing the discussion questions by the end of the day they are listed under. Written assignments listed under each day are accompanied by a due date. Other items of interest for each topic will be posted on ELMS in the 'Course Documents' section within folders titled by the class day they correspond to. Students are encouraged to look at all of these other items and consider them when reading and discussing the topics of this class. I will also post an announcement after each class day on the schedule to provide an introduction to the topic and readings for the next class day.

### **Discussion**

Participating in the discussion topics posted on ELMS is an important part of this online course. For each class day there will be one or two discussion questions (see class schedule below). Students are expected to be actively involved in the discussion topics. Active involvement involves (1) answering the discussion question *using evidence from the class readings and from sources outside of the class material*, (2) responding to and critiquing the answers of your classmates, and (3) defending your own answer from responses and critiques. The class instructor will act as a moderator of the discussion. Students will be graded both on how active they are in the discussion and on the lucidity and persuasiveness of their arguments. Finally, it is important that everyone remain respectful during the discussion. Students will be penalized for carrying an inappropriate tone in the discussion. Discussion on each topic will remain open until the end of the day the discussion is listed on the class schedule (see class schedule below). In other words, if the discussion is listed under (date) then students have until the end of that day to finish discussing the question at hand. Discussion will be worth 30% of each student's final grade.

### **Written Assignments**

Students will complete one short written assignment per week. Each assignment is listed below (see class schedule) along with a due date. Each assignment should be roughly 5 pages in length and follow proper citation procedure. I do not care which citation style you use (Chicago, MLA, AP/SA, etc...) as long as it is done correctly. It is important to remember that in each assignment you are asked to take a side and make an argument supporting that side. Thus, in order to write a good paper, students will be expected to make a logical and coherent argument and then support it with *documented evidence*. This evidence could be from the class material or could be from sources outside of the class material. Students will be graded on how logical their argument is, and on how well they support their argument with evidence, as well as on their grammar and citation style. These assignments will be worth 35% of each student's final grade.

### **Final Exam**

The final exam will be a timed exam taken on ELMS. It will involve both short answer questions and longer essay-style questions. Anything read or discussed during the course of the semester will be fair game for the exam. The exam will be posted on the final class day and will be available for the entire 24 hours. Once began, students will have 2 hours to complete the exam. It will be worth 35% of each student's final grade.

### **Email Policy**

I encourage students to email me with any inquiries they may have about the class or the class material. However, it is important to note that I too have a busy schedule and may not be able to respond to your emails immediately. During the week (Monday-Friday) please leave 24 hours for me to respond to your inquiries. On the weekend, please allow for 48 hours. For my part, if I need additional time to adequately answer your question, I will contact you within these time frames to let you know.

### **Re-Grading Policy**

Students wishing to challenge their grade on an assignment are required to submit a short, one page, single-spaced write-up documenting why they believe their grade should be reviewed. After I have read over the document I will meet with the student. After the meeting if the student still wants their grade reviewed, I will re-grade the assignment. However, students should understand that regrading could cause a student's grade to go up *or* down.

### **Academic Honesty**

All students will be expected to abide by the University of Maryland's rules for academic honesty. No cheating, plagiarism, or other serious offenses will be tolerated. Violation will result in disciplinary action. This includes the use of proper citation in ALL papers completed for the class. Please speak to the instructor if you have any questions.

### **Disability Services**

Students with disabilities who are registered with the University of Maryland are encouraged to meet with me to arrange the appropriate academic accommodations. For further information on University accommodations for students with disabilities, contact the Disability Support Service in the Counseling Center (301-314-7682).

# Class Schedule

## June 2<sup>nd</sup>: Introduction & Design of the American Presidency

- Topics:
  - Class Introduction
  - Studying the Presidency
  - The Constitutional Design
  - Debating the Design
- Readings:
  - Pika and Maltese, ch. 1, pp 1-17; & Appendix C
  - Nelson, ch. 1
  - *Federalist Papers*, no. 67, 69-77 (<http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa00.htm>)
  - *Anti-Federalist Papers*, no. 48, 51, 67-76 (<http://www.utulsa.edu/law/classes/rice/constitutional/AntiFederalist/antifed.htm>)
- Discussion Questions:
  - For every president since WWII, public opinion polling has shown that almost every president grows increasingly unpopular as their term progresses. What does this mean for the president's ability to do his/her job? Are expectations for the president too high for any single person to meet?
  - The anti-federalists found the possibility of a powerful president to be disconcerting. The federalists countered that the Constitutional design would guard against this. But the Constitutional language describing executive authority is rather vague. Without reading further into the class material, do you believe American president's to be sufficiently constrained or are presidents more powerful than the founders had intended them to be?
- Assignment(s):
  - No assignment.

## June 5<sup>th</sup>: Institutional Development of the Office

- Topics:
  - Historical Development
  - Expansion of Powers
  - The Modern Presidency
- Readings:
  - Pika and Maltese, ch. 1, pp. 17-29
  - Nelson, ch. 3 & 14
  - [ER] Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency*, ch. 11
- Discussion Question(s):
  - In your opinion, what was the single most important factor in the expansion of presidential power – (1) precedents set by individual presidents, (2) congressional delegation, or (3) the institutional growth of the office? Provide evidence for why the reason you have chosen has been most important, and why the other two have been less important.
- Assignment(s):
  - In *The Imperial Presidency*, Schlesinger argues that presidential power has grown to an unsafe degree. However, another common narrative among observers often

focuses on everything the president is *unable* to do. Evaluate *New York Times* articles on the president between the following dates (dates TBA). In the articles you read do you find Schlesinger's description accurate, or do you find that presidents are typically portrayed as weak and unable to get things done? (due June 12<sup>th</sup>)

### **June 9<sup>th</sup>: Presidential Power & Success, Part I**

- Topics:
  - Theoretical Sources of Power
  - Washington's Impact
  - Evaluating Presidential Success
- Readings:
  - Pika and Maltese, ch. 4
  - Nelson, ch. 4
  - [ER] Neustadt, *Presidential Power*, ch. 3
  - [ER] Kernell, *Going Public*, ch. 2
- Discussion Question(s):
  - Who was the greatest president in American history? Why?
  - Do you find Neustadt's, Kernell's, or Skowronek's theory of presidential power most compelling? Why? What are the deficiencies of the other two theories?
- Assignment:
  - No assignment.

### **June 12<sup>th</sup>: Presidential Power & Success, Part II**

- Topics:
  - The Importance of the Individual
  - Management Style
  - Evaluating Presidential Psychology
- Readings:
  - Pika and Maltese, ch. 4
  - Nelson, ch. 5 & 6
  - [ER] Barber, *The Presidential Character*, ch. 1 & 2
- Discussion Question(s):
  - Is analyzing presidential psychology a useful way of analyzing presidential success? Does Barber's typology add anything to our understanding of presidential power and success or is it vague enough that we could find enough evidence to put any president in any category?
- Assignment:
  - Using Barber's categories – *character, world view, style, power situations, and climate of expectations* – evaluate the psychology of Barack Obama. Would you classify Obama as an active-positive, active-negative, passive-positive, or passive-negative? Defend your classifications using *documented* evidence from Barack Obama's past and provide proper citation for your evidence. Be objective in your analysis. Rating President Obama highly or lowly on the basis of your personal or partisan prejudices is not adequate for this assignment. (due June 19<sup>th</sup>)

## June 16<sup>th</sup>: The President, the Party, and Congress

- Topics:
  - Relationship with the Party
  - Negotiating with Congress
  - Circumventing Congress
- Readings:
  - Pika and Maltese, ch. 5
  - Nelson, ch. 13 & 17
  - [ER] Moe and Howell, “Unilateral Action and Presidential Power: A Theory”
- Discussion Question(s):
  - A major theme of the readings this week is that the separation of powers put in place in the Constitution leads to a battle for power between Congress and the President. Which of these two branches do you think *should* hold more power in the policymaking process? Why?
- Assignment:
  - No assignment.

## June 19<sup>th</sup>: The President, the Supreme Court, and the Bureaucracy

- Topics:
  - Agency Problems
  - Nominating Process
  - Interacting with the Court
  - Managing the Bureaucracy
- Readings:
  - Pika and Maltese, ch. 6 & 7
  - Nelson, ch. 15, 18, & 20
- Discussion Question(s):
  - One trend in the past 40 years has been the changing composition of Supreme Court nominees (see *Nelson* pp. 498). Specifically, nominees for the high court have been less often politicians, and more often experienced judges. Why has this trend occurred? What might this mean for the nomination and confirmation process or for Executive-Judicial relations in general?
  - How important do you think the power of appointment is for the president? Discuss this in regards to *both* the bureaucracy and the federal courts.
- Assignment:
  - The readings from the past two classes have highlighted the barriers that the president faces to making things happen in the American system of government: to pass a law the president must work with Congress; to direct the executive branch the president must work with the vast bureaucracy; and for anything to be possible the president must work with the members of his or her party. Altogether, what are the barriers the president faces in enacting his policy preferences into law? How can, and how does, the president make anything happen despite these barriers? Do you think there are too many institutional constraints on presidential action? Why or why not?  
(due June 26<sup>th</sup>)

## **June 23<sup>rd</sup>: The President, Public Opinion, and the Media**

- Topics:
  - How the Public Sees the President
  - Ebbs and Flows in Approval
  - President and the Media
  - The Permanent Campaign
- Readings:
  - Pika and Maltese, ch. 3
  - Nelson, ch. 9, 10, & 11
  - [ER] Patterson, prologue, ch.1, & postscript
- Discussion Question(s):
  - Brace and Hinckley argue that the “decay curve” is an inevitable part of presidential approval. In other words, presidential approval will inevitably fall throughout a presidency, “irrespective of the economy, the president, or outside events.” Is this an accurate assessment? Are all presidents doomed to failure in the eyes of the public? Does this perspective mesh with what we have learned thus far this semester?
  - Numerous scholars argue that a key to presidential success is making appeals to the public. In fact, presidents spend an inordinate amount of time making public appeals for their policies. However, Patterson argues that this may be a fruitless effort as the media will unnaturally skew and control the message of presidents and presidential candidates. Do you find Patterson’s argument compelling? If so, does it mean that “going public” is not a viable presidential strategy?
- Assignment:
  - No assignment.

## **June 26<sup>th</sup>: The President and Policymaking: Domestic & Foreign**

- Topics:
  - How the President Leads Policymaking
  - Institutional Advantages
  - The Commander in Chief
- Readings:
  - Pika and Maltese, ch. 8 & 10
  - Nelson, ch. 19 & 21
- Discussion Question(s):
  - Have President’s usurped the war power that rightfully belonged to Congress? Or have presidents since World War II acted within their Constitutional authority in using the nation’s military? Why or why not?
- Assignment:
  - In 1973 Congress passed the War Powers Act to limit Presidential ability to use the armed forces in foreign wars. Describe the War Powers Act and why Congress felt compelled to pass it. Was the act necessary, and if so, has it been effective? (due July 3<sup>rd</sup>)

## June 30<sup>th</sup>: Presidential Elections, Part I

- Topics:
  - The Structure of Presidential Election
  - The Electoral College
- Readings:
  - Pika and Maltese, ch. 2
  - *Federalist Papers*, no. 68, 71, & 72 (<http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa00.htm>)
  - [ER] Edwards, *Why the Electoral College is Bad for America*, ch. 1
  - [ER] Shaw, *The Race to 270*, ch. 3
- Discussion Question(s):
  - The Electoral College strongly influences our system of selecting a president. In light of Edwards' argument, can you find anything defensible about the Electoral College, or is Edwards right that it is bad for America and a danger to our democracy?
  - Every election year presidential candidates raise and spend hundreds of millions of dollars. Consider the data presented here (<http://www.opensecrets.org/pres08/indusall.php?cycle=2008>) on the top 5 industries donating to Barack Obama and John McCain in 2008. What does this say about the American system of electing a president? What would the founders think of the current state of campaign finance?
- Assignment:
  - No assignment.

## July 3<sup>rd</sup>: Presidential Elections, Part II

- Topics:
  - Evolution of the Nominating Process
  - Presidential Primaries
  - The General Election Campaign
  - Do Campaigns Matter?
- Readings:
  - Pika and Maltese, ch. 2
  - Nelson, ch. 8
  - [ER] Campbell, *The American Campaign*, ch. 1 & 9
  - [ER] Readings on Nomination Process (see course reserves)
- Discussion Question(s):
  - As Campbell highlights, there is a debate among scholars as to whether presidential campaigns really matter. Reviewing the debate as described in your readings, do you agree that campaigns have relatively little impact on election results, or do you think that argument is flawed and that campaigns are of great importance to the outcomes of presidential elections? Why or why not?
- Assignment:
  - The current system of selecting presidential nominees through partisan primaries has been fairly controversial since its inception in the 1970s. In light of the readings this week, do you believe we should reform our system of nomination? If so, how should it be reformed? If not, please explain the positive aspects of the process as you see them. (due July 10<sup>th</sup>)

## **July 7<sup>th</sup>: Tying it Together: The Bush & Obama Presidencies**

- Topics:
  - The Bush Presidency in Perspective
  - Ranking George W. Bush
  - Future of the Obama Presidency
- Readings:
  - Listen to this: Stephen Skowronek and James Mann on the Bush Presidency (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5128639>)
  - Shenkman, “George Bush’s Misplaced Hope” (<http://hnn.us/articles/33283.html>)
  - Readings on Obama, TBA
- Discussion Question(s):
  - The final act of a presidency is the creation of its legacy. Once a president leaves office, journalists, historian, political scientists, and citizens alike begin to evaluate the presidency and its place in history. How should we evaluate presidents and their time in office? Are rankings useful? Why or why not?
  - Given everything we have learned this semester, what do you make of the Bush presidency? Was he a powerful president? Was he in any way a successful president?
- Assignment:
  - No assignment.

## **July 10<sup>th</sup>: Final Exam**

- Remember to take the FINAL EXAM today on ELMS!