

POL 220 – The American Presidency

Fall 2021

Kirby Hall 109 – W/F 11:00 – 12:15

Instructor: Prof. Zack Scott
email: scottz@wfu.edu
Office: Kirby Hall 316

Office Hours: T 9:00 – 11:00 a.m., 12:00 –
3:00 p.m.; By Appointment

Course Description: American presidents are unrivaled among political actors in their ability to capture the fascination of onlookers. They are unquestionably in a position of tremendous prominence, influence, and power. This has tended to lend a certain mystique to the office. This course will seek to dispense with this awe and focus with clear eyes on the institution as it truly is. We will discuss the original design of the presidency and how it has evolved in the intervening centuries. We will discuss the individuals who have occupied the presidency, including how the idiosyncrasies and faults endemic to anyone have materialized in the practice of executive leadership. We will discuss how the presidency fits into the broader political system to make governance happen. And we will do all these things while unpacking the American presidency not long removed from the inflection point between the Trump and Biden administrations.

Course Goals: By the end of the semester, students should...

- Understand the historical development of the American presidency
- Understand the historical development of American presidential elections
- Understand the nuanced interplay between presidential characteristics and political context
- Understand the presidency's place in America's political system
- Understand the president's formal and informal influence over policymaking
- Have reflected on the normative implications of presidential legacies and presidentialism in general
- Developed a level of familiarity with the empirical study of the American presidency
- Have improved as critical writers.
- Have improved as advocates for their logic-based, critical, respectful arguments.

These goals are ambitious but eminently achievable. Accomplishing these goals will require the professor and each student to buy in to a collective learning enterprise. You should expect me to come to class prepared to explain core concepts and ready to moderate a discussion of the most intellectually contentious and intriguing aspects of those concepts. Here is what I expect and need from you. I expect you to do the assigned readings before the associated class period. I expect you to keep up to date with current events related to the American presidency. I expect you to come to class ready to discuss the readings, the implications, and the practical

applications to current events. I expect you to take the assigned papers and projects seriously, give them your best effort, and turn in work you can be proud of.

I do *not* expect you to have mastered all of the materials and skills on Day 1. If it were that easy, there wouldn't be much of a point to having the class. If you find yourself struggling with a reading or assignment, please know that this is part of the educational journey. And it's a journey you do not undertake alone. Please seek out help from the resources available to you including your fellow students and the professor.

Reading Materials: There are no required books for this class. All readings will be posted on the course site.

Laptop Policy: The policy of the department of political science is that laptop computers only be used classrooms for note taking and other academic purposes as designated by the instructor. I will permit laptops on a contingency basis. I reserve the right to ban computer use in their courses should this policy be repeatedly violated.

Academic Integrity: Academic dishonesty constitutes attempting to pass off the work of others as your own without proper attribution. It is unacceptable in this course, just as it is unacceptable in life. If I find that you plagiarized, cheated, or were otherwise dishonest about your work on an assignment, you will automatically receive a 0. There will be no exceptions or excuses. Such situations not only go against my classroom policies but are also violations of the [Wake Forest Honor Code](#). As such, they will be referred to the Honors and Ethics Council. If you are unsure if you are providing proper attribution or have any other questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Accommodations: Wake Forest University provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. If you are in need of an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact me privately as early in the term as possible. Retroactive accommodations will not be provided. Students requiring accommodations must also consult the Learning Assistance Center & Disability Services (118 Reynolda Hall, 336-758-5929, lac.wfu.edu).

Assignments: Grades will be calculated as following:

- Exam 1 – 25%
- Exam 2 – 25%
- Response Papers – 40%
- Participation – 10%

Exams – There will be two exams in this class. Both will be take-home exams. Students can use their notes, the course readings, and any posted resources in completing the exams. The exams are not a collaborate endeavor (i.e., students must work

on them alone). Students are also not allowed to use resources other than those directly pertaining to the course (i.e., no Google or Wikipedia). Exams will be a combination of short answer and essay questions. Exams will be posted online at midnight of the start date and will be due within 72 hours. Students may use the entire time window to take the exam.

Response Papers – Students will turn in four response papers throughout the semester, each worth 10 percentage points of the final grade. Each paper will respond to a provided prompt. There are six total prompts from which to choose, each due on the listed date. Students can choose whichever four of the six prompts they would like. Papers should generally be 4-5 pages, double spaced. A primer with specific guidelines and a breakdown of grading procedures will be posted online.

- **Prompt 1** (Due Sept. 15): Design a process for selecting a president that you think would work better than the current electoral system. Explain what makes this process superior. You may not change the office of the presidency itself in any way in creating your answer (i.e., you can't make it a parliamentary system).
- **Prompt 2** (Due Oct. 13): Consider the following list of traits: persuasiveness, intelligence, curiosity, integrity, empathy, collegiality, ideological rigidity, and communicativeness. Which do you think most important to a president? Least important? Why? How important are they in determining how effective or successful a president is?
- **Prompt 3** (Due Nov. 3): Considering the formal powers of the presidency and the power dynamics when presidents interact with other political entities and forces (i.e., the rest of the Executive branch, the other branches of government, public opinion, etc.), are presidents too reliant on others to be effective leaders? Explain your reasoning.
- **Prompt 4** (Due Nov. 19): On which issue or domain is presidential leadership most important? Are presidents generally effective leaders on this issue or in this domain? Explain your reasoning, provide at least one example, and assess what presidential or contextual factors matter most for effectiveness.
- **Prompt 5** (Due Dec. 1): Would America be better off switching to prime minister model of executive leadership instead of a presidency? In justifying your answer, explain what you think the chief advantages and disadvantages would be to such a change. Given your answer, are there contexts where the alternative model would be superior?
- **Prompt 6** (Due Dec. 3): Looking at a recent ranking of presidents, identify one president you think is significantly overrated and one that you think is significantly underrated. Explain your reasoning, including a description of the method you think is best for evaluating presidential legacies.

Participation – Students are expected to be active participants in their learning. Participation will be holistically and subjectively assessed based on the frequency and quality of contributions to class discussion. Attendance is part of participation as if you are not there, you necessarily cannot participate.

Grades: Letter grades will be assigned based on the following:

<i>Letter grade</i>	<i>Percent grade</i>
A	93.5 or greater
A-	89.5 – 93.49
B+	86.5 – 89.49
B	83.5 – 86.49
B-	79.5 – 83.49
C+	76.5 – 79.49
C	73.5 – 76.49
C-	69.5 – 73.49
D+	66.5 – 69.49
D	59.5 – 66.49
F	59.49 or below

Course Schedule: I reserve the right to modify the course schedule and/or readings as needed. Modifications will be announced in class and via email.

Module	Topic	Key Questions	Required Readings	Recommended Readings	Assignments
The Evolution of the Presidency	Aug. 25: Syllabus Day	*What do you expect from a president	1) The syllabus		
	Aug. 27: Presidency at the Founding	*What did the Founders expect from presidents? *How did expectations inform the office?	1) Excerpts of Constitutional Convention Debates 2) Constitution, Article II 3) Federalist 67 , 70 , 71 , & 72 4) Cato #4	1) Phelps – “George Washington and the Founding of the Presidency”	
	Sept. 1: Evolution	*How have expectations of the presidency changed over time? *How have presidents responded to changing expectations?	1) Rudalevige – <i>The New Imperial Presidency</i> , chapter 2 2) Washington’s 1789 Inaugural Address 3) Jefferson’s 1801 Inaugural Address 4) Lincoln’s Letter to Albert G. Hodges, April 4, 1864 5) Eisenhower’s 1961 Farewell Address 6) Trump’s 2017 Inaugural Address 7) Biden’s 2021 Inaugural Address	1) Washington’s Farewell Address 2) Jackson's Bank Veto Message 3) Lincoln’s 1865 Inaugural Address 4) FDR’s 1933 Inaugural Address	
Presidential Elections	Sept. 3: Primaries	*How do we pick our presidential nominees? *How has the way we pick our presidential nominees changed over time?	1) Bartels – <i>Presidential Primaries and the Dynamics of Public Choice</i> , chapter 2 2) Cohen et al. – “Party Versus Faction in the Reformed Presidential Nominating System” 3) Azari – “How the News Media Helped to Nominate Trump”	1) Carleton – “The Revolution in the Presidential Nominating Convention” 2) Norrander – “Presidential Nomination Politics in the Post-Reform Era” 3) Lawrence & Boydston – “What We Should Really Be Asking About Media Attention to Trump”	
	Sept. 8: General Elections	*How do we pick our presidents? *How has the way we pick our	1) Slonim – “The Electoral College at Philadelphia” 2) Shaw – “The Methods behind the Madness”	1) Finkelman – “The Proslavery Origins of the Electoral College”	

		presidents changed over time?	3) Aldrich et al. – <i>Change and Continuity in the 2016 & 2018 Elections</i> , chapter 13	2) Lipsitz - “The Consequences of Battleground and ‘Spectator’ State Residency...”	
	Sept. 10: The Campaign Trail	*How do candidates campaign for the presidency? *How does campaigning affect presidents in office?	1) Troy – <i>See How They Ran</i> , chapters 1 and 10 2) Dickerson – <i>The Hardest Job in the World</i> , chapter 25	1) Hart – <i>Campaign Talk</i> , chapter 6 2) Sides, Tesler, & Vavreck – <i>Identity Crisis</i> , chapter 8 3) Dickerson – <i>The Hardest Job in the World</i> , chapters 22 and 24	
	Sept. 15: Presidential Mandates	*Are mandates real? *How do presidents discern their mandates?	1) Dahl – “Myth of the Presidential Mandate” 2) Azari – “Institutional Change and the Presidential Mandate”	1) Hershey – “The Constructed Explanation” 2) Masket – <i>Learning from Loss</i> , chapter 3	Prompt 1 Response Paper Due
The People Who Hold the Office	Sept. 17: Presidential Leadership and Persuasiveness	*Does a president’s skill at managing situations affect how they lead?	1) Neustadt – <i>Presidential Power</i> , chapters 1 and 3 2) Edwards – <i>The Strategic President</i> , pgs. 1-14		
	Sept. 22: Presidential Personality Types	*Does a president’s personality affect how they lead? *Do certain personality types make for more successful presidents?	1) Post – <i>The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders</i> , chapters 8, 12, and 13 2) McAdams - “The Mind of Donald Trump”	1) Simonton – “Presidential Style” 2) Hermann & Preston - “Presidents, Advisers, and Foreign Policy”	
	Sept. 24: Presidential Ideologies	*Does a president’s ideology affect how they lead? *Does ideology get in the way of practical governance?	1) Witcher – <i>Getting Right with Reagan</i> , chapters 2, 4, and 13	1) Langston – “Ideology and Ideologues in the Modern Presidency” 2) Smith – “Ronald Reagan’s Rhetorical Re-invention of Conservatism”	
	Sept. 29 and Oct. 1	No Class Sessions			Exam 1 posted on Monday (Sept. 27). Due on Wednesday (Sept. 29).

	Oct. 6: Presidents as communicators	*Does a president's skill at communicating affect how they lead? *Are better communicators better presidents?	1) Tulis – <i>The Rhetorical Presidency</i> , pgs. 189-202 2) Scacco & Coe – <i>The Ubiquitous Presidency</i> , chapters 1 and 5	1) Tulis – <i>The Rhetorical Presidency</i> , chapters 1 and 6	
	Oct. 8	No Class Session. Fall Break			
	Oct. 13: Presidents in Political Time	*Does circumstance dictate leadership style? *Does circumstance dictate leadership success?	1) Skowronek – <i>The Politics Presidents Make</i> , chapters 1-3 2) Goldberg – “The First Post-Reagan Presidency”	1) Skowronek – <i>Presidential Leadership in Political Time</i> , chapter 7	Prompt 2 Response Paper Due
Presidents as Collaborators, Conciliators, Quarrelers, and/or Capitulators	Oct. 15: Presidents, the White House, and the Bureaucracy	*How do presidents interact with their staff? *How do presidents interact with the executive bureaucracy?	1) Burke – <i>The Institutional Presidency</i> , chapter 1 and pgs. 53-58 2) Kennedy – “Do This! Do That! And Nothing Will Happen” 3) Skowronek, Dearborn, & King – <i>Phantoms of a Beleaguered Republic</i> , chapters 1 and 5	1) Milkis & Jacobs – “I Alone Can Fix It” 2) Lewis & Moe – “The Presidency and the Bureaucracy” 3) Cohen, Hult, & Walcott – “The Chicago Clan”	
	Oct. 20: Presidents and Congress	*How do presidents interact with Congress? *Is unilateral action good or bad for democracy?	1) Edwards – “The Presidents and Congress” 2) Lee – “Dividers, not Unifiers” 3) Edwards – “No Deal”	1) Canes-Wrone – “The President's Legislative Influence...” 2) Moe & Howell – “Unilateral Action and Presidential Power” 3) Fine & Warber – “Circumventing Authority” 4) Ostrander & Sievert – “The Logic of Presidential Signing Statements”	
	Oct. 22: Presidents and the Courts	*How do presidents interact with the judicial system?	1) Epstein & Segal - <i>Advice and Consent</i> , chapters 3 and 5 2) Savage - “Trump Is Rapidly Reshaping the Judiciary” 3) Coastan – “Social Conservatives Feel Betrayed By the Supreme Court”	1) Anderson, Cottrell, & Shipan – “The Power to Appoint”	

	Oct. 27: Presidents and Political Parties	*Do presidents lead their parties (or do the parties lead the presidents)?	1) Stid – “Woodrow Wilson and the Problem of Party Government” 2) Milkis – <i>The President and the Parties</i> , chapter 3 3) Milkis & Rhodes – “Barack Obama, the Democratic Party, and the Future of the ‘New America Party System’”	1) Skinner – “Barack Obama and the Partisan Presidency” 2) Ware – “Donald Trump’s Hijacking of the Republican Party in Historical Context” 3) Galvin – “Party Domination and Base Mobilization”	
	Oct. 29: Presidents and the Media	*How effective are presidents at controlling media narratives? *Do presidents still need to rely on the media?	1) Kernell – <i>Going Public</i> , chapters 1 and 3 2) Maltese – “The Presidency and the News Media” 3) Scacco & Coe – <i>The Ubiquitous Presidency</i> , pgs. 23-36	1) Baum & Kernell – “Has Cable Ended the Golden Age of Presidential Television” 2) Bennet, Lawrence, & Livingston – <i>When the Press Fails</i> , Introduction	
	Nov. 3: Presidents and Public Opinion	*Do presidents lead or follow public opinion?	1) Canes-Wrone – <i>Who Leads Whom?</i> , pgs. 103-156	1) Canes-Wrone & Kelly – “The Obama Presidency” 2) Edwards – <i>On Deaf Ears</i> , chapters 2 and 8	Prompt 3 Response Paper Due
	Nov. 5	No Class Session			Exam 2 posted on Wednesday (Nov. 3). Due on Friday (Nov. 5).
Presidents Getting Things Done (Maybe)	Nov. 10: Moral Leadership	*Can presidents save the soul of America?	1) Shogan – <i>The Moral Rhetoric of American Presidents</i> , chapters 2 and 5		
	Nov. 12: Domestic Policy	*How has presidential power over domestic policy changed over time?	1) Light – “Domestic Policy Making” 2) Krause – “The Secular Decline in Presidential Domestic Policy Making” 3) Shull – “Legislative Adoption of Presidents’ Domestic Policy Initiatives”	1) Light – “The President’s Agenda”	
	Nov. 17: Foreign Policy	*Are their two presidencies? *What are the president’s foreign policy powers?	1) Wildavsky – “The Two Presidencies” 2) Howell & Pevehouse – “Presidents, Congress, and the Use of Force”	1) Flesher et al. – “The Demise of the Two Presidencies”	

			3) Canes-Wrone, Howell, & Lewis – “Toward a Broader Understanding of Presidential Power”	2) Glazier & Boydston – “The President, the Press, and the War”	
	Nov. 19: The Imperial Presidency and Unitary Executive Theory	*Is the presidency imperial? *Is presidential power limited?	1) Rudalevige – <i>The New Imperial Presidency</i> , chapter 7 2) Crouch et al. – “The Unitary Executive Theory and President Donald J. Trump”	1) Rudalevige – <i>The New Imperial Presidency</i> , chapter 3 2) Howell & Rogowski – “War, the Presidency, and Legislative Voting Behavior” 3) Torture Memos	Prompt 4 Response Paper Due
	Nov. 24 and Nov. 26	No Class Sessions, Thanksgiving Break			
Course Wrap-Up	Dec. 1: American Presidentialism, Compared and Contrasted	*How is American presidentialism different from other types of executive leadership *Is American presidentialism worse than other methods of executive leadership?	1) Heffernan – “Why the Prime Minister cannot be a President” 2) Linz – “The Perils of Presidentialism”		Prompt 5 Response Paper Due
	Dec. 3: Legacies	*How do we evaluate presidents?	1) C-SPAN – “ Presidential Historians Survey ” 2) Edsall – “ The Fight Over How Trump Fits in with the Other 44 Presidents ” 3) Schlesinger – “Rating the Presidents: Washington to Clinton” 4) Neustadt – <i>Presidential Power</i> , chapter 9	1) Bose – “Presidential Ratings” 2) Rottinghaus, Eady, & Vaughn – “Presidential Greatness in a Polarized Era”	Prompt 6 Response Paper Due