

★ THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY ★

PSC 306, Fall 2013
University at Buffalo, SUNY
322 Millard Fillmore Academic Complex
6:00 – 8:50pm Wednesdays

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Course Description

This course examines the fundamental characteristics of the American presidency. The course lectures and readings address many questions about the presidency. Among these questions are the following:

- What are the Constitutional powers of the presidency?
- What were the intentions of the Framers in designing the office of the President?
- How has the presidency changed over American history?
- What are the formal and informal functions or responsibilities of the President—what “hats” do they wear?
- Are the powers sufficient to meet the responsibilities of the office or are they excessive?
- Do Americans expect too much from their presidents?
- How is the Executive branch organized around the president?
- Have certain administrative styles of management and delegation of responsibilities to subordinates proved more successful than others?
- What is presidential leadership?
- Are presidential powers primarily “the power to persuade”?
- How do the sources and extent of political support for a president’s election affect how he governs, what policies he promotes once in office?
- Is the success of presidents in dealing with Congress dependent on their popularity with the American public?
- Do presidents conduct a “permanent campaign” in office and, if so, is this a problem and why?
- How can we judge a president to have been successful or not?
- What circumstances affect whether presidents are successful or not?
- Who are considered by presidential scholars to have been the great presidents and why are they considered great?
- Who are considered failed presidents and why?
- How have the evaluations of presidents changed over time?
- How do presidential evaluations of presidential scholars differ from those of the contemporary public who lived during a presidency?
- What are the personal qualities and psychological traits that make for a successful presidency or a failed presidency as judged by either presidential scholars or contemporary publics?
- What political conditions favor presidential success?
- Are presidents elected by larger margins judged to have been more successful than those who are not?
- Are presidents elected with a Congress controlled by the same party judged to have been more successful than those who are not?
- Are war-time presidents judged to have been more successful than peace-time presidents?
- How does the performance of the immediate past president affect whether the next president will be successful?
- How do changes in partisanship affect whether a president is successful?
- Are activist presidents necessarily more successful presidents?
- Do presidents represent the general public, voters, or their political parties?
- Are moderate presidents the most successful?
- What kinds of mistakes do presidents make that cause them to “fail”?

Student Learning Outcomes

My hope is that this course will teach you to think more rigorously in general and particularly about presidential politics. Beyond that, I hope is that the course will provide you with important information and theories regarding the presidency and political leadership. If successful, these learning outcomes will

be useful to you in many capacities of everyday life, in your roles as active citizens, and in your occupations, should your careers move you toward an engagement in the political process and government. More specifically, students are expected by the end of the semester to have achieved the following learning outcomes:

1. Be familiar with different explanations of the presidency,
2. Understand the history of the presidents from Washington to Obama,
3. Understand the fundamental characteristics and evolution of the American presidency,
4. Improve their ability to apply social scientific reasoning,
5. Improve their ability to express clearly their reasoning in both written and verbal forms,
6. Be able to interpret statistics applied to social scientific questions,
7. Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the modern presidency.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COURSE

The course is organized in seven sections as follows:

1. The Office and its Occupants: From Washington to Obama
2. The Theory of Presidential Power
3. Presidential Traits and the Circumstances of Presidencies
4. Presidents and the Economy
5. Are Moderates Better Presidents?
6. Why Do Presidents Fail?
7. The Success and Failure of Presidencies: Rating the Presidents

As relevant, we will also discuss the successes and failures of recent presidents.

REQUIRED READING

There are four books and a number of readings that are required reading for this course. The books are:

Robert Dallek, 2001. *Hail to the Chief: The Making and Unmaking of American Presidents*, Oxford University Press.

Richard M. Pious, 2008. *Why Presidents Fail: White House Decision Making from Eisenhower to Bush II*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Alvin Stephen Felzenberg, 2008. *The Leaders We Deserved (and a few we didn't): Rethinking the Presidential Rating Game*, Basic Books.

Gil Troy, 2012. *Why Moderates Make the Best Presidents: George Washington to Barack Obama*, University Press of Kansas

These books are available for purchase at the UB bookstore. The books are referred to by the author's last name in the listing of reading assignments. The readings include the following:

The Constitution of the United States, Article I, Section 7; Article II; and the 12th, 20th, 22nd and 25th Amendments.

Stephen Skowronek, 2008. "Presidential Leadership in Political Time," *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal*, pp. 27-78.

Larry M. Bartels, 2008. *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 2.

James E. Campbell, 2011. "The Economic Records of the Presidents: Party Differences and Inherited Economic Conditions," *The Forum*, vol.9, issue 1, article 7. (And follow-up articles by Comisky and Marsh and my response).

James E. Campbell, 2012. "Political Forces on the Obama Presidency: From Elections to Governing," in Bert Rockman, Andrew Rudalevige, and Colin Campbell's *The Obama Presidency*. (Washington, DC: CQ Press) pp.67-93.

James Bryce, 1891. "Why Great Men Are Not Chosen Presidents," from *The American Commonwealth*

In addition to the reading and lectures, we will be viewing a number of episodes of *The American President*, a documentary series on the presidency that was written, directed, and produced by Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr., Philip B. Kunhardt III, and Peter W. Kunhardt. The series is narrated by noted journalist Hugh Sidey and includes extensive commentary by Richard Neustadt, the most important presidential scholar of the twentieth century.

The chapters and articles in these reading assignments are designated below for weeks throughout the course. Consult the reading list in this syllabus frequently. It is important that you do not fall behind. Because of the need to discuss some background material early in this class, your reading will be "ahead" of what we initially discuss in class, but classes will eventually discuss the readings at the appropriate time. Also, since the course is being conducted in the midst of a presidential campaign, we will regularly discuss issues and questions raised by the campaign. This is part of the course and you are as responsible for this material as that in the lectures and readings.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your course grade will be based of four considerations. These will combined in the following percentages to compute your overall course grade:

Class Participation	12%
Quizzes	15%
Midterm Examination	34%
Final Examination	39%

Student Learning Outcomes and Grades: The extent to which you have achieved the learning outcomes itemized at the beginning of this syllabus will be assessed by each of the four evaluation components of the grade: participation, quizzes, and the two examinations.

Participation

Class participation counts for 12 percent of your course grade. Although the evaluation of your course participation is unavoidably subjective, two factors will affect this component of your grade. counts for 10 percent of your course grade.

(A.) Attendance counts. You are expected to attend class regularly. You are expected to know about anything said in the class lectures or discussions. Nothing short of a personal or family emergency is as important as this class during its scheduled meeting time. Attendance will be taken at different times in the course on a random basis. Unless it cannot possibly be avoided, do not plan to be anywhere else when this class is scheduled (no vacations, no appointments, etc.).

(B.) The quality of your participation counts. Insightful questions and comments are rewarded in the participation grade. Inattentive and/or distracting behavior detracts *substantially* from your participation grade. In this regard, I must also make a point of classroom behavior. All students attending class are expected to pay attention and attend the entire class meeting, unless arrangements have been made with me before the class. Students who are obviously not paying attention (eg. reading newspapers) or who leave class prior to the end of the class meeting will receive a failing class participation grade. Also, remember that this is not a “movie” and even during the showing of a documentary, you should remain seated for the duration. It is inappropriate to leave the class room while a lecture or discussion is in progress unless it is an emergency (you feel sick or *must* otherwise use the bathroom facilities).

Quizzes

There will be a number of quizzes in this class. One will be on your knowledge of who the American presidents are and when they took office. Another will be an unannounced quiz sometime before the midterm exam. A third will be a quiz after the midterm examination drawn from questions asked on the exam. There are absolutely no make-up options for these quizzes. There will also be other quizzes following discussions of segments of *The American Presidency* documentary in the class. The quizzes collectively count for a combined 15 percent of your grade.

Midterm Examination

A midterm exam is scheduled for Week 8. It will cover the lectures, in-class videos, and assigned readings up to and including that covered in Week 7. The midterm examination will be composed of "objective" questions (true-false, multiple choice, list). I reserve the right to push back the date of the midterm based on the progress of the course, but will inform you of any change at least two class meetings before the test. Once examinations are distributed to the class, *no one* will be permitted to leave the room and return to the test. The midterm exam counts for 34 percent of your course grade.

Final Examination

The final exam will be comprehensive, covering material throughout the course, but will emphasize material after the midterm test. The final examination will include a take-home essay which will be distributed at the last regular class meeting. It is your responsibility to pick one up in class or check with the professor to obtain a copy. Once examinations are distributed to the class, *no one* will be permitted to leave the room and return to the test. The final examination counts for 39 percent of your course grade.

Grades: Grades on the five components of your overall course grade are based on 100 point scale. The numerical and letter grades are associated as follows

Letter Grade	Numerical Grade
A or A-	90 to 100
B+, B, or B-	80 to 89
C+, C, or C-	70 to 79
D+ or D	60 to 69
F	59 and below

Numerical grades are rounded. For example, a grade of 89.5 translates into a letter grade of A-. Plus and Minus grades (eg. B+ or B-) are roughly within one point of the adjacent letter grade. The instructor reserves the right to scale exams and quizzes depending on their degree of difficulty.

You are expected to take the exams at the times scheduled for the whole class. Failure to take a test at the specified time will be counted as a zero for that portion of the course. Exceptions to this rule will only be made when the student confronts extreme circumstances and then, only when arrangements have been made with me *prior* to the examination or due date. If you have difficulty getting in touch with me, you

can always send me an e-mail or leave a message for me on my office phone answering machine. But in any case, if you have significant problems you should get in touch with me *as early as possible*. My contact information is at the top of the first page of this syllabus.

In more general terms, you are expected at all times to conduct yourself in accord with the university's policy regarding **Academic Integrity**. If you are not already familiar with UB's standards of academic responsibility and integrity, you should familiarize yourself with them at <http://academicintegrity.buffalo.edu/>

You should also be familiar with UB's policy regarding "Obstruction or Disruption in the Classroom" at <http://www.student-affairs.buffalo.edu/judicial/classroom.php>

Finally, as the **Accessibility Resources** website indicates: "the University at Buffalo is committed to providing students with disabilities access to all the university's resources and programs. While this goal is shared across the campus community, AR coordinates requests for reasonable accommodations to help ensure that your needs are met in a timely and effective way. Accommodations are various modifications or adjustments that are made to provide people with disabilities equal opportunity to access information, programs, services. If you need to request an accommodation please contact us to arrange a meeting with AR staff." For more information see: <http://www.buffalo.edu/accessibility/students.php>



WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF LECTURES, FILMS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1. August 28

Introduction to the Course
The Office and the Presidents
The Constitutional Office—Article II and the Amendments
VIEW: *The Presidents: Washington to Monroe*
READ: The U.S. Constitution (sections directly pertinent to the presidency)
Troy, Introduction and chapter 1

Week 2. September 4 (No Class, Rosh Hashanah)

The Federalist Papers on the Presidency
Models of Presidential Leadership—Neustadt, Barber, and Skowronek
Presidential Traits: Character and Trustworthiness
READ: Dallek, *Hail to the Chief*, chapter 5
Felzenberg, *The Leaders We Deserved*, chapter 2

Week 3. September 11

Presidential Traits: Vision, Sense of Direction, and Principles
VIEW: *The American President: Executive Vision – The American Way*
READ: Dallek, *Hail to the Chief*, chapter 1
Felzenberg, *The Leaders We Deserved*, chapter 3

Week 4. September 18

Presidential Traits: Competence and Pragmatism
VIEW *The American President: The Candidate – The Heroic Posture*
READ: Dallek, *Hail to the Chief*, chapter 2
Felzenberg, *The Leaders We Deserved*, chapter 4

Week 5. September 25

Presidential Traits: Ability to Persuade and Consensus-Building
Presidential Traits: Charisma, Communication Skills, and Ability to Inspire
VIEW *The American President: Politics and the Presidency – The Professional Politician*
READ: Dallek, *Hail to the Chief*, chapters 3 and 4

Week 6. October 2

Presidents and Policy: The Economy

Presidents and Policy: Justice, and Extending Liberty

VIEW *The American President: An Office and Its Powers – Expanding Power*

READ: Felzenberg, *The Leaders We Deserved*, ch. 5 and 6
Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*, chapter 2.
Campbell, “The Economic Records of the Presidents: Party Differences and Inherited Economic Conditions”

Week 7. October 9

Presidents and Policy: Defense and Foreign Policy

Presidents in “Political Time” (Skowronek)

Intellectual “Brilliance” and the Presidency (Simonton)

The President’s Personality: Active-Passive, Positive-Negative (Barber)

VIEW *The American President: Executive Vision – The World Stage*

READ: Felzenberg, *The Leaders We Deserved*, ch. 7.
Skowronek, “Presidential Leadership in Political Time”

MIDTERM EXAM
– OCTOBER 16 –

Week 8. October 16

Part One of: Do Moderates Make the Best Presidents? Washington to TR

READ: Troy, *Why Moderates Make the Best Presidents*, Intro. and chapters 1, 2, 3, & 4

Week 9. October 23

Part Two of: Do Moderates Make the Best Presidents? FDR to Jimmy Carter

VIEW: *The American President: The Candidate – Compromise Choices*

READ: Troy, *Why Moderates Make the Best Presidents*, chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9

Week 10. October 30

Part Three of: Do Moderates Make the Best Presidents? Reagan to the present

VIEW: *The American President: Politics and the Presidency – The Independent Cast of Mind*

READ: Troy, *Why Moderates Make the Best Presidents*, ch. 10, 11, 12, Conclusion & Afterword

Campbell, “Political Forces on the Obama Presidency: From Elections to Governing”

Week 11. November 6

Part One of: Why Do Presidents Fail? Ike to Gerry Ford

VIEW: *The American President: An Office and Its Powers – The Balance of Power*

READ: Pious, *Why Presidents Fail*, Introduction, chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4

Week 12. November 13

Part Two of: Why Do Presidents Fail? Carter, Reagan, and Bush 41

VIEW: *The American President: A Matter of Destiny – Family Ties*

READ: Pious, *Why Presidents Fail*, chapters 5, 6, and 7

Week 13. November 20

Part Three of: Why Do Presidents Fail? Clinton to the present
Rating the Presidents: Overall and By Components
What Affects the Presidential Ratings?

VIEW *The American President: A Matter of Destiny – Happenstance*

READ: Pious, *Why Presidents Fail*, chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11
Bryce, “Why Great Men Are Not Chosen Presidents”

Week 14. November 27 No Class: The Night before Thanksgiving

Week 15. December 4

The Original Rating of the Presidents: Retrospective Voting Meets Presidential Studies
The Case of the People vs. Presidential Scholars
What Matters and What Does Not?

READ: Felzenberg, *The Leaders We Deserved*, ch. 1 and 8
Dallek, *Hail to the Chief*, Afterword

FINAL EXAMINATION, TBA



This syllabus is in keeping with UB’s policy of May 8, 2013 regarding “Course Syllabi Requirements.” The above sections of the syllabus have presented a course description, course requirements, the academic content of the course, intended student learning outcomes, my grading policy, the link of the intended learning outcomes to each of the components in the course grade, UB’s academic integrity policy (they are for it), UB’s available accessibility resources, and my office hours. If this syllabus gets any longer, it may rival the small print of a credit card application or the license agreements on software that none of us read – but it is all here, and if not, please feel free to let me know. I will try to answer any question about the course that you might have.