

The American Presidency

Political Science #230

Illinois Wesleyan University

Dr. Greg Shaw

{sample syllabus only – this may not reflect the details of the current course}

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Course description and requirements:

This introductory course to the American presidency gives particular emphasis to the presidency in its relations with the other two branches of the federal government, both historically and in the present day. The course covers legislative agenda setting and other matters related to lawmaking, congressional-executive struggles over implementation of laws, challenges to bureaucratic control, war making, impeachment, the nomination process, and court challenges to executive and legislative initiatives, among other topics. Students will gain an understanding of contemporary practices of inter-branch relations and current theoretical approaches to explaining those practices. Class meetings will be divided between some lecture and much discussion of assigned readings. It will be very important that you complete each week's reading assignments prior to the first class meeting of that week. Successful completion of the introductory American politics course (#101) or a very good advanced placement preparatory course is a prerequisite. You should be prepared for a somewhat heavy reading load and quite a bit of intellectually challenging work. You will have the opportunity to explore an area of particular interest through researching and writing a substantial term paper.

Students' grades will be based on 2 essay-type exams, a term paper, a series of quizzes, and class participation. The first exam is worth 20% of the final course grade, and the final exam is worth 30%. The paper is worth 30%. Collectively the quizzes count for 10% of the course grade, and participation in class discussions comprises the remaining 10% of the grade. About one week before each exam I will distribute a list of questions resembling, but not identical to, the questions that will appear on the up-coming exam. This should give students a framework for study and should be taken as a rough indicator of the level of difficulty and style of the actual exam questions. Taking an exam at a time other than the regularly scheduled time requires advance approval from me. Quizzes will focus almost entirely on the assigned readings, so it's in your interest to keep up on those readings. There are no make-up opportunities for missed quizzes.

You will choose a term paper topic in consultation with me. Topics should be narrow enough as to be manageable within 12-15 pages. Papers need not focus exclusively on recent events, but the paper should offer clear implications for contemporary governance. Each student will submit a term paper proposal, an annotated bibliography, a paper outline, and the finished term paper by the dates indicated below. Late papers will suffer a 10% reduction in grade for each day they are late, weekends included. Late papers should be e-mailed to me as soon as possible in order to stop the penalty clock. Your final paper should be printed on standard 8½ x 11 paper and stapled in the corner. No paperclips please. You may pick up your graded papers during the spring term.

Grades and statement on academic integrity:

Final course grades will be assigned on the following basis: 90-100% = A/A-; 80-89% = B+/B/B-; 70-79% = C+/C/C-; 60-69% = D; below 60% = F. Plus/minus grades typically fall within about 3 points of each decile. Requests for a grade of incomplete are strongly discouraged. Under no circumstance will any student receive an incomplete without first consulting me well in advance of the end of the term.

I am aware that academic dishonesty has become common at some institutions. While I am sure that very few, if any, Illinois Wesleyan students would cheat on class assignments, the university’s policy and my policy on academic dishonesty bear repeating. Academic dishonesty fundamentally undermines the mission of the university and cheapens our collective enterprise. Students caught cheating on an exam or engaging in plagiarism on written assignments will receive a failing grade for the course. In these cases I will also file a formal complaint with the administration. The university’s academic dishonesty policy states that the administration will move to expel from the university any student who is the object of two such substantiated complaints. See the university catalog for further explanation.

Readings:

The following texts are required reading and are available at the university bookstore.

The Presidency and the Political System, 8th edition, edited by Nelson, Congressional Quarterly Press (2005) [referred to below as “Nelson”]

The Evolving Presidency, 2nd edition, edited by Nelson, Congressional Quarterly Press (2004) [referred to below as “Evolving”]

Congress Confronts the Court, edited by Campbell and Stack, Rowman and Littlefield (2001)

Polarized Politics: Congress and the President in a Partisan Era, edited by Bond and Fleisher, Congressional Quarterly Press (2000)

Other readings are available on the library’s electronic reserve (password: president). They’re marked with an asterisk below.

Week and Topic	Readings
Course introduction Perspectives on the presidency and Congress Popular expectations and contemporary roles	Nelson, chapter 1 Evolving chapt. 1
The early presidency Historical experiences Article II and the 12 th amendment	Nelson chapt. 2, 3 Evolving chapt. 2-4, 9, 12
The modern presidency Growth of administrative capacity FDR and the New Deal Nixon’s “Imperial Presidency”	Evolving chapt. 19, 20, 22, 26-28, 40 Nelson chapt. 4, 5 *Schlesinger chapt. 1-3, 7, 11
The White House and the executive bureaucracy Bureaucratic control Executive branch nominations The Cabinet	Nelson chapt. 14, 15, 20 Evolving chapt. 5, 21, 23

Agenda setting	Bond & Fleisher chapt. 6
<i>Term paper proposals due</i>	
Congressional-executive relations: Part I Law-making	Evolving chapt. 13 Nelson chapt. 17, 19
Congressional-executive relations: Part II Congressional oversight and investigations	Evolving chapt. 43, 46 Bond & Fleisher chapt. 7, 8
<i>Mid-term exam</i>	
Congressional-executive relations: Part III Censure and impeachment	Evolving chapt. 18, 37 – 39, 47
Congressional-executive relations: Part IV Foreign policy and war-making	Evolving chapt. 6, 10, 14, 15, 24, 30, 33, 34, 36, 44, 49, 50 Nelson chapt. 21
<i>Annotated bibliographies due</i>	
Presidential/congressional/judicial relations	Nelson chapt. 18 Evolving chapt. 17, 25 Campbell & Stack chapt. 1-4, 7, 8 *Binder essay
Party polarization and shared governance	Bond & Fleisher chapt. 1-3 Nelson, chapter 13
<i>Paper outlines due</i>	
Divided government	none
The media & public opinion	Nelson chapt. 10 & 11 Bond & Fleisher chapt. 4 Murray and Howard, <i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i> article, vol. 66 #4 (available via J-STOR)
Assessing the George W. Bush presidency	Barbara Sinclair essay* Mark Rozell essay* Michael Nelson essay*
What creates successful presidential leadership? Personal leadership, political time, friends in Congress, or a combination of these?	Nelson chapt. 6 Bond & Fleisher chapt. 9
The psychological presidency	

Conclusions

Term papers due

Final exam: cumulative with emphasis on 2nd half of semester