

# The U.S. Presidency

**Government 310** Fall 2017

**Location** Hepburn 19

**Time** 8:30am-10:00am T/R

**Final Exam Period** December 18 M, 1:30pm-4:30pm

**Instructor** James Sieja

**Email** jsieja@stlawu.edu

**Office** Hepburn 210

**Drop-in Office Hours** 1:00pm-5:00pm M, 1:00-4:00pm T, 9:00am-1:00pm W, and by appointment

## Overview

While there is no bad time to study the American presidency, it seems to be a pretty hot topic right now. Nuclear war can do that. But, day-to-day news coverage of the *president* only scratches (poorly) the surface of how political scientists think about the *presidency*. Indeed, the more enduring questions – Where does presidential power come from? How can it be legitimately exercised? What constitutes effective leadership? – will be the focus of this course. And we'll talk about presidential elections, too, because they are integral in helping to answer other questions.

The enduring questions are a tough challenge for political scientists because, in many respects, every president is different. Because a political scientist's job is often searching for regularity in what appear to be chaotic social and institutional relationships, the fact that there are only 44 different presidents to try to draw parallels across makes it even harder. (And oh by the way, those 44 people are spread across 228 years of history.)

One of the main goals in this class will be to expose you to the different tools political scientists have used to create answers to important questions regarding the presidency. We will examine the four most popular tools for studying the presidency: constitutional-legal analysis, historical analysis, psychological analysis, and power analysis.

## Course texts

There is no single textbook for this course. There are, however, five books you need to purchase, not only because they will look good on your bookshelf someday, but also because we will be reading significant portions of each. They are

Edwards, George C. 2009. *The Strategic President: Persuasion and Opportunity in Presidential Leadership*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Howell, William G. 2013. *Thinking about the Presidency: The Primacy of Power*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (Abbreviated *TATP* on the course schedule)

Howell, William G. and Terry M. Moe. 2016. *Relic: How Our Constitution Undermines Effective Government, and Why We Need a More Powerful Presidency*. New York: Basic Books.

Skowronek, Stephen. 2011. *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal, Second Edition*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Wayne, Stephen J. 2012. *Personality and Politics: Obama For and Against Himself*. Washington: CQ Press.

As part of our close look at the way the United States elects its president, the class will collectively read two books on the Electoral College. You will be assigned to argue one side of the debate over the Electoral College. You need to purchase only the book that corresponds with your side. (The correct one should be apparent from the titles.) They are

Edwards, George C. 2011. *Why the Electoral College Is Bad for America, Second Edition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Ross, Tara. 2012. *Enlightened Democracy: The Case for the Electoral College, Second Edition*. Dallas: Colonial Press.

Finally, the closest thing we have to a textbook is a slim volume that is optional to purchase. It will give you many of the “nuts and bolts” of the presidency, and it is relatively inexpensive:

Jones, Charles O. 2016. *The American Presidency: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

I will provide additional readings electronically via the course Sakai site.

### **Course format**

Because this is an upper-level course, my role is not to talk at you. Instead, my role is to facilitate discussion of the ideas and research we will encounter over the course of the semester. Coincidentally, you have the same role. It is imperative, then, that every member of the class comes prepared (i.e., having read the materials carefully and critically) to discuss the day’s topic. The success of the class depends on your dedication to preparation and engagement.

Attendance and participation are mandatory to the extent that they factor significantly in your final grade. Note: It is not possible to do well on the latter if you do not do well on the former.

### **Course requirements and grading**

Midterm 1 (October 19):	12%
Midterm 2 (December 18):	12%
Approach papers (due dates below):	16% (4 @ 4% each)
Electoral College debate project:	15% (5% group product and 10% individual contribution)
Research paper (December 14):	30%
Attendance and participation (throughout):	15%
Total:	100%

**Let me know before class if you must miss.** There is no acceptable number of unexcused absences. Regardless of the reason for your absence, you are responsible for the material covered during the class meeting. After two unexcused absences, each subsequent unexcused absence will lower your final letter grade by a quarter-point (e.g., a 3.25 becomes a 3.0 at three unexcused absences, a 2.75 at four, etc.)

I will employ a standard grading scale:

4.0 (100-97)	3.25 (90-87)	2.5 (80-77)	1.75 (70-67)	1.0 (61-60)
3.75 (97-93)	3.0 (87-83)	2.25 (77-73)	1.5 (67-63)	0.0 (below 60)
3.5 (93-90)	2.75 (83-80)	2.0 (73-70)	1.25 (63-61)	

I will not round grades as a matter of course; however, your *exceptional* effort in one or more elements of the final grade may be considered a plus factor if your grade is on the borderline. There is no curve in this course, though I reserve the right to adjust grade cutoffs if necessary. The adjustments will only work neutrally or in your favor, if applied.

Barring clerical error (e.g., I added up the points incorrectly), all grades are final. I am always willing to talk with you about grades and suggest ways to improve. But, I will not bargain over grades or points, nor will there be extra credit opportunities.

*There is no pass/fail option for this course. There are no exceptions to this policy.*

### **Exams**

We will have two midterm exams, one roughly halfway through the semester and another during the scheduled final exam period. Neither is cumulative. The exams will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

### **Approach reaction papers**

**After we are finished with our examination of each approach, you will be responsible for turning in a 1.5 to 2.5 page reaction paper on that approach.** What are its strengths? What are its weaknesses? What insight does it give us to presidential power and leadership? How do you think you would go about using the approach to examine a president or presidents? That is, what would the process of research look like? Where would you go? What materials would you use? These questions should get you started, but they are not intended to define the limits of what you can address in your reaction paper.

### **Research paper**

The final paper will be a substantial analytical work (14 to 16 pages) in which you use one of the four approaches we discuss in class to explain comparatively the behavior of two presidents on the same topic. For example, you could compare Millard Fillmore and Harry Truman's respective foreign policy decisions using the historical approach.

The one restriction on the choice of presidents, topics, and approaches is that you cannot pick a combination of president and approach that is found in one of the assigned books for the class. So, for example, you cannot choose to use the psychological approach and write about President Obama. You can, however, certainly write about Obama using the power approach, or write about George Bush using the psychological approach.

These next two weeks are (believe it or not) a really good time to start thinking about your research paper. There's not a lot going on academically, so you can get a jump on things and reduce your workload later. In any event, you need to meet with Dr. Sieja in office hours (or by appointment) **by the end of September** to talk about how you plan to approach the research paper.

I will begin to read rough drafts when you return from Thanksgiving break. For up to two (2) percent extra credit on your final grade, you may volunteer to review a peer's rough draft. The extra credit will be determined based on the thoroughness and promptness of your peer evaluation.

Citations will follow the American Political Science (APSA) citation guide, a copy of which can be found here: <http://www.apsanet.org/portals/54/Files/Publications/APSASStyleManual2006.pdf>. Pay particularly close attention to pages 17 through 33.

**The final paper is due in hard copy when we meet on December 14.**

### **Electoral College debate**

No electoral system is perfect. (If you don't believe me, google "Arrow's theorem.")

That said, some electoral systems may be better or worse than others, and not just with respect to preference aggregation. We will break the class into two groups to debate the continued usefulness of the Electoral College. Based on the relevant book for your side and outside research that you choose to do - the Edwards book, for example, is fairly short on remedies for the perceived problems - your group will develop a comprehensive argument for or against the Electoral College.

What does "comprehensive" mean? In short, you should make the best positive case for your "pure" position ("We are 100 percent right!"), you should anticipate counterarguments and respond appropriately (remember, no electoral system is perfect, so neither the Electoral College nor any alternative plan is perfect by definition), you should argue directly against the other side's case, and you should offer alternatives not inconsistent with your position (if you don't like the best positive case, here are some other things we could go for).

You will be evaluated on this assignment in both your individual and corporate capacities. **Every individual will need to turn in a 3.5 to 4.5 page narrative reflection.** The narrative reflection will describe the process your group went through to develop your argument and what you personally contributed to the project. You will also professionally evaluate one other member in your group regarding their contribution to the overall product. **As a group, you will generate a one-page report identifying who did what, which you will all sign and turn in.**

### **Expectations and technology policy**

I expect this class, the readings, making an argument, and getting involved to be the thing you care about most in the world during the 180 minutes we meet each week. I expect you to come to class at least having read the material for the class, even if you haven't fully understood it or have an opinion on it yet. That's why we have class - to work through those issues. But, understanding and evaluation of the material will be difficult if you have not done the first part: reading them yourself.

I expect you to bring assigned reading material to class with you. Some of the readings are on the course Sakai site or accessible through the library's databases. For this reason, if you do not print out the readings, you should bring a laptop with which you can access them. Accessing readings and note-taking are the only regularly authorized uses of an electronic device during class. As someone (the internet claims Abraham Lincoln, but I'm dubious) once said, "If you're here, be here."

### **Disability accommodations**

Please inform me during the first two weeks of classes if you need any accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or assessments of this course to enable you to participate fully. Confidentiality of the shared information will be strictly maintained. We will work with Disability

and Accessibility Services (<http://www.stlawu.edu/disability-and-accessibility-services>) if accommodations require such assistance.

### Academic honesty

I expect everyone to conduct themselves with integrity and honesty in this class. There are two facets to this expectation.

First, all of the work you do in this class will be your own. Don't cheat. Don't plagiarize. Don't take short cuts. If you commit an act of academic dishonesty, I am bound to follow the procedures outlined in the St. Lawrence University Student Handbook (available at <http://www.stlawu.edu/sites/default/files/resource/Student%20Handbook%202016-2017%20updated%20feb17.pdf>) The Handbook describes what constitutes academic honesty and penalties for violation on pages 94 through 100. Again, don't cheat.

As the semester goes on, you may find yourself in a situation where, due to multiple pressures on your time, you may consider taking a short cut in order to turn in an assignment or paper by the deadline. If this is the case, the thing to do is to drop everything and contact me via email immediately regarding your situation. I can help relieve some of the pressure related to my class in a way that is equitable for the other students in the class as well. But, I can't do anything for you once you commit an act (knowingly or negligently) of academic dishonesty.

Second, I expect everyone to be intellectually honest. This means listening attentively to other's comments and questions and responding appropriately. Some of the material in the class is controversial, and an intellectually vibrant community like St. Lawrence ought to entertain opinions on most any side of a controversy. Moreover, a liberally-educated person ought to be able to articulate fearlessly the "best case" for any legitimate proposition. So, we will not resort to *ad hominem* attacks, shut-down-by-slogan, or straw person arguments. (Ok, I might do the straw person argument sometimes, but only for effect.) Believe in the rightness of your argument; be prepared to challenge both yourself and others; and be open to changing your mind.

### Topics and readings

Please note that the **readings are subject to change**. I have listed chapters from *A Very Short Introduction* where they fit in, but remember that they are not required.

- I. Introduction to the Course (August 31)
- II. Studying the Presidency and Evaluating Presidents (September 5)  
*TATP*, Chapter 4  
Schlesinger, Arthur M. 1997. "Rating the Presidents: Washington to Clinton." *Political Science Quarterly*, 179-190.  
Taylor, Mark Zachary. 2012. "An Economic Ranking of US Presidents, 1789-2009: A Data-Based Approach." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 596-604
- III. Constitutional-Legal Analysis (September 7-14)  
\* *Very Short Intro*, Chapters 1-2\*  
Article II of the US Constitution (9/7)  
The *Federalist*, Nos. 67, 70-72 (9/7)  
Corwin, Edward S. *The President: Office and Powers, 1787-1957*, 3-30 (9/7)  
*TATP*, Chapter 3 (9/7)

- Schmitt, Gary J. "President Washington's Proclamation of Neutrality." (9/12)  
 Tulis, Jeffrey K. "The Two Constitutional Presidencies." (9/12)  
 Taft, William H., Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. "Assessing the Constitutional Presidency." (9/14)  
 Pious, Richard M. "Prerogative Power and Presidential Politics." (9/14)

**Due September 19: Constitutional-Legal Analysis Reaction Paper**

- IV. Historical Analysis (September 19-26)  
*Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, Chapters 1-5 (roughly 1-2, 3-4, and 5 on the first, second, and third days respectively)

**Due September 28: Historical Analysis Reaction Paper**

- V. Psychological Analysis (September 28 & October 3)  
*Personality and Politics*, Chapters 1-4 (1-2 on 9/28, 3-4 on 10/3)

*Be sure to meet with Dr. Sieja by September 29 to discuss your research project.*

**Due October 5: Psychological Analysis Reaction Paper**

- VI. Power Analysis (October 5-17)  
*The Strategic President*, Chapter 1 (10/5)  
*TATP*, Chapter 1 (10/5)  
*The Strategic President*, Chapters 2-3 (10/10)  
 Mayer, Kenneth. "Going Alone: The Presidential Power of Unilateral Action." (10/10)  
*The Strategic President*, Chapters 4-5 (10/17)

**Due October 19: Power Analysis Reaction Paper**

**Midterm Exam 1, October 19**

- VII. Primary Politics (October 24-26)  
 \* *A Very Short Introduction*, Chapter 3\*  
 Redlawsk, David P., Caroline J. Tolbert, and Todd Donovan, *Why Iowa?*, "Iowa Caucus Rules." (10/24)  
 Wayne, *Road to the White House*, Chapter 5 (10/24)  
 Anderson, Jeffrey H. and Jay Cost, "A Republican Nomination Process." (10/26)  
 Wang, Tova A. "The Presidential Primary System's Democracy Problem." (10/26)
- VIII. The General Election (October 31 & November 2-9)  
 Bryce, James. "Why Great Men Are Not Chosen President." (10/31)  
 Wayne, *Road to the White House*, Chapter 7 (10/31-11/7)  
 Dahl, Robert. "The Myth of the Presidential Mandate." (11/7)  
*Enlightened Democracy* or *Why the Electoral College Is Bad for America*, entire (10/31-11/9)

**Electoral College Debate: In class, November 9**

- IX. The Presidency as an Institution (November 14)  
 \* *A Very Short Introduction*, Chapters 5-6\*  
 Waterman, Richard. "The Administrative Presidency, Unilateral Power, and Unitary Executive Theory."

Burke, *Presidential Power*, 87-101

X. The President and the Courts (November 16-28)

Yalof, David. *Pursuit of Justices: Presidential Politics and the Selection of Supreme Court Nominees*, Chapters 1 & 7 (11/16)

Nemacheck, Christine. *Strategic Selection: Presidential Nomination of Supreme Court Justices from Herbert Hoover through George W. Bush*, Introduction and Chapter 6 (11/16)

Massaro, John. *Supremely Political: The Role of Ideology and Presidential Management in Unsuccessful Supreme Court Nominations*, Chapters 5 & 6 (11/28)

Black, Ryan C. and Ryan J. Owens. *The Solicitor General and the United States Supreme Court*, Chapter 2 (11/28)

*Begin turning in rough drafts on November 27.*

XI. (Re)Evaluating the Presidency and Prospects for Change (November 30 & December 5-14)

\* *A Very Short Introduction*, Chapter 7 \*

*TATP*, Chapters 5-7 (11/30)

*Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, Chapter 6 (12/5)

*The Strategic President*, Chapter 6 (12/7)

*Personality and Politics*, Chapters 6-7 (12/12)

*Relic*, Chapters 2-4 (12/12-12/4)

**Due December 14: Research Paper**

**Final Exam Period: Midterm 2, December 18 M, 1:30pm-4:30pm**