

The American Presidency (POLS 432)

Spring 2009

Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:00 – 4:15 p.m.

Northern Plains Biostress 26

South Dakota State University

Brookings, SD

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

From SDSU *Undergraduate Bulletin, 2008-2009*: "A study of the constitutional background, development, powers, responsibilities, and roles of the American presidency, with comparisons to other executives."

The framers of the U.S. Constitution constructed a system of separate institutions to prevent tyranny. Their design carefully calibrated a set of checks on the unrestrained growth of any single branch, especially the president. While empowered with specific grants of formal authority, the presidency was severely limited in the face of an independent, powerful Congress and strong local governments.

However, in the last century, American presidents have aggrandized power so that the office bears little resemblance to the original constitutional intent. The Presidency has evolved from a constrained head of state into a virtual dictatorship with wide-ranging powers in times of crisis, especially foreign policy and economic collapse. These informal powers combined with a propensity for unilateral action endow the American president with more influence over world events than any other individual since the Roman Emperors. Both the Congress and public opinion have meekly accepted—and in some cases encouraged and supported—these developments. Neither the Supreme Court nor the media have issued clear calls for a return to a more limited presidency. Nor have the political parties and interest groups erected obstacles to this new presidential centered system; on the contrary, these ostensibly mediating institutions have been co-opted by the presidency. Thus, these expansive presidential powers threaten the very democratic underpinnings of the American political system!

Thus, the first goal of this course is to investigate the expanding role of the presidency in the American political system. How much formal authority and informal power does the president possess? Which political actors may serve as allies or enemies in presidents' efforts to accomplish their goals? What situations and circumstances provide opportunities to affect politics and policy? How does this affect the capacity of other actors, especially Congress and public opinion, to check imperialist ambitions by strong executives?

The second goal of this course is to understand the presidency as a leader. We will explore the decision making process of presidents as political leaders. In particular, we will focus on presidential decisions to understand the kinds of abilities, capacity, mental dexterity, and intelligence necessary for successful political leadership. What kinds of leadership skills

and personal qualities are required of a successful president? Indeed, what makes a president successful?

The course objectives follow from these two goals. To understand the presidency's place in the political system (i.e., the first goal), we will ask four questions about the institution:

- (1) **How are leaders selected for office?** That is, by what process does someone become president? What kinds of individuals seek and win the presidency? How does this process affect their governing decisions?
- (2) **How do presidents organize their offices?** What kinds of staff, procedures, agendas, and allocation of resources do presidents use? How does this affect their ability and capacity to accomplish their goals?
- (3) **How does the presidency interact with other political actors?** To what extent does the presidency cooperate or clash with governmental actors like the Congress, the bureaucracy, and the judiciary? Does the presidency try to lead, coerce, or manipulate public opinion and the media? In short, is the presidency's relationship with each of these actors basically conflictual or harmonious?
- (4) **How does the presidency affect public policy?** In what ways does the institution steer or lead the actual workings of government and its effect on citizens?

To explore political leadership (i.e., the second goal), we will study a classic explanation of presidential power which suggests that presidents must husband and develop their informal powers to coerce (or "persuade") other actors to follow. Students will test this theory by examining a presidential decision of their own choice in depth.

PREREQUISITES AND EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS:

At a minimum, students are expected to complete an introductory course in political science (preferably, POLS 100 "American Government"). As an upper-division course for political science majors, this course requires substantial prior in political science, especially U.S. and comparative politics. Moreover, students are expected to be familiar with current events and recent U.S. history. Obviously, students who are attentive to and interested in American politics will have a distinct advantage.

To facilitate learning, students are expected to engage in sets of activities that promote critical thinking and an intelligent exchange of ideas. First, I hope that students will develop an inquisitive, probing mind; curiosity and a willingness to learn are the highest aspirations and best marker of a learned person. Second, I encourage students to invest time and effort to become informed about current events. Perhaps the most effective means to accomplishing this goal is to read a major daily newspaper (e.g. the *Argus Leader* is widely available in hard copy; *Washington Post* or *New York Times* are available online). News "junkies" may also watch a good weekend half-hour TV news show (e.g., PBS' *Washington Week in Review* or one of the Sunday morning shows) or listen to National Public Radio or BBC News whenever possible. I also highly recommend a good newsweekly magazine like *The Economist*.

In terms of classroom mechanics, students must read and consult this syllabus throughout the semester. I expect students to attend class and be prepared for class by completing the assigned readings. I encourage students to ask questions before, during, and after class. While students are expected to attend class, I do not require or expect students to document "excused absences." It is imperative that students complete and turn in all assigned work on time. Students who believe they have a valid excuse to miss a deadline must consult with the instructor as soon as possible PRIOR to the deadline. Those who submit work late, lose one whole letter grade for each day it is submitted late.

**PLEASE SEE THESE ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS
ON DESIRE 2 LEARN**

- **ACADEMIC POLICIES**
- **EXAM INSTRUCTIONS**
- **PAPER ASSIGNMENTS**
- **PAPER GUIDELINES**

GRADING PROCEDURES:

Final grades will be based on the following components:

Item	Percentage
Mid-Term Exam	15
Final Exam	25
Part One of Paper	10
Part Two of Paper	20
Final (Complete Draft) Paper	30
Total Possible Points	100

RESEARCH PAPER:

Students will produce a paper that is a comprehensive analysis of a single case study as an application of Neustadt's theory. The first two parts of the paper are essential ingredients towards that goal. Part One is a summation of Neustadt's theory; Paper Two is a presidential decision, presented as a case study. The Final Paper is an integration and expansion of these efforts. These papers must be submitted via the Dropbox in d2l as a MS Word attachment. Paper deadlines as follows:

Due Date	Part
February 11 (Wednesday)	One
March 16 (Monday)	Two
May 1 (Friday)	Final

EXAMS:

Students will complete their exams via Desire 2 Learn. Students will have 75 minutes to complete the Midterm Exam and 100 minutes to complete the Final Exam. These exams will be available for several days before the posted closing time. Both exams will include open-ended

essay questions that will strive to test students understanding of the material and their ability to organize a diverse range of information. These questions are aimed at developing students' capacity to analyze politics and assemble logical arguments with supporting evidence. Each exam has a database of several questions; the software will randomly select two questions from that pool for each student to answer. The Mid-Term Exam will close on March 23 (Monday) at 5:00 p.m. The *comprehensive* Final Exam will close on May 8 (Friday) at 5:00 p.m. These exams will be graded on completeness, accuracy, content validity, organization, and clarity.

TEXTS: The following two (2) texts have been ordered and should be available at the SDSU bookstore:

Edwards, George C. III, and Stephen J. Wayne. 2006. Presidential Leadership: Politics and Policy Making. 7th ed. New York: Wadsworth.

Genovese, Michael A. 2007. Memo to a New President: The Art and Science of Presidential Leadership. New York: Oxford University Press.

I have placed several copies of the following text on **Reserve in Briggs Library**.

Neustadt, Richard E. 1990. Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan. New York: Free Press. (This is the most recent edition, but the older editions—also on reserve—contain the same material for the chapters assigned.)

In addition to the copies of Neustadt, the following text is available on **Reserve in Briggs Library**, from which one chapter is assigned:

Shapiro, Robert Y., Martha Joynt Kumar, and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2000. Presidential Power: Forging the Presidency for the Twentieth-First Century. New York: Columbia University Press.

READING ASSIGNMENTS

Date(s):	Topic: (Reading Assignment)
January 21	An Introduction to the American Political System
January 26	An Introduction to Presidential Leadership (Edwards and Wayne, Chapter 1; Genovese, Chapters 1 – 5)
January 28, February 2, 4	The Personal Power Approach (Neustadt, Chapters 1 - 5 and pp. 122-27; Shapiro et al., Chapter 2)
February 9, 11	Presidential Knowledge (Genovese, Chapters 6 – 17)
February 18, 23, 25	Getting Elected to the Presidency (Edwards and Wayne, Chapters 2 – 3)
March 2, 4	The Presidency and Non-governmental Actors (Edwards and Wayne, Chapters 4 – 5; Genovese, Chapters 18, 19, 23, and 24)
March 16, 18	Organizing the Office of the Presidency (Edwards and Wayne, Chapters 6 – 8; Genovese, Chapter 20)
March 23 (no class)	MIDTERM EXAM (on Edwards and Wayne, Chapters 1 – 8; Genovese, Chapters 1 – 20, 23, and 24)
March 25, 30, April 1, 6	The Presidency and Governmental Actors (Edwards and Wayne, Chapters 9 – 11; Genovese, Chapters 21 and 22)
April 8, 15, 20	Individual Consultations
April 22, 27, 29	The Presidency and Policy Making (Edwards and Wayne, Chapters 12 – 14; Genovese, Chapters 25 – 32)
May 8 (Fri.), closes at 5:00 p.m.	FINAL EXAM

NOTICES

Advising is a very important resource designed to help students complete the requirements of the University and their individual majors. Students should consult with their advisor at least once per semester to decide on courses, check progress towards graduation, and discuss career options and other educational opportunities provided by SDSU. Advising is a shared responsibility, but students have final responsibility for meeting degree requirements.

Students should check their grades online at <https://wa-sdsu.prod.sdbor.edu/WebAdvisor/webadvisor>. Moreover, SDSU uses your student "jacks" email address as the primary means of communicating with students regarding official matters (including advising, billing, and notification of course deficiencies). Students should regularly check this email account for pertinent information.

South Dakota State University is committed to providing equal access to University programs and services for all students. Under University policy and federal and state laws, students with documented disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations to ensure the student has an equal opportunity to perform in class. If any member of the class has such a disability and needs special academic accommodations, please notify me and make the appropriate arrangements with the Office of Disabilities Services. The ODS is located in SWSC 125. To schedule an appointment, call (605) 688-4504 and request to speak with Nancy Hartenhoff-Crooks, the Coordinator of Disability Services. Reasonable accommodations may be arranged after the Office of Disabilities Services has verified your situation. Do not hesitate to contact me if any assistance is needed in this process.

DISCLAIMER: This syllabus is subject to change. Verbal announcements during class or email messages via the D2L

system are sufficient notification of such alterations.