

PLS 315: The U.S. Presidency

Fall 2014

Professor Josh M. Ryan

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 2-3:30 pm. and by appointment. You are also welcome to stop by my office at other times and I'll make every attempt to meet with you.

Class Time: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 11:00-11:50 am.

Course Description

This course is meant to provide an advanced understanding of the American Presidency. The course will go beyond journalistic accounts and provide a comprehensive, theoretical, and logical framework by which we can analyze the presidency. This course is about more than just presidents; it examines the presidency as an institution and seeks to clarify how the president, despite lacking significant formal power, has managed to become (arguably) the most powerful institutional actor in American government. In short, this course focuses on the presidency as an institution rather than the president as a person or personality. Of course, the course will also discuss these aspects of the job, but our focus is an institutional one within a social science context.

The course is loosely organized into three sections. The first section of the class develops some basic tools that we will need to fully understand the president and provides some background and context. The material includes an introduction to theories of rationality, empirical methods, and an introduction to critical reading and writing. The second section of the course will focus on the president's place in our separated powers system. These powers include both the formal (e.g. the veto, commander-in-chief, head of the bureaucracy), as well as informal powers such as the power to persuade, the power to agenda-set, and the ability of the president to act as the symbol of American government. The third section of the course will deal with important political issues facing the country today, major policy debates and how these issues affect and are affected by the president. Note that these sections are not mutually exclusive and sequential.

At the end of the course, students should understand presidential powers within the context of a rigorous theoretical framework. The president, as a rational actor who is almost wholly dependent on other institutions, especially Congress, acts within and around the office's constitutional constraints. Students will understand how the president does this, and why the Framers created such a formally weak executive. Students should also understand how the role of the president has changed due to changing expectations, the willingness of presidents to acquire more power, and the media. The evolution of the president's role in our separated system is an ongoing debate that has repercussions for policymaking, and influences many of the important current ideological debates in the country.

Because we will use rational choice theory and empirical methods to analyze Congress, there may be some differences between this class and other political science classes you may have had. Rationality broadly assumes that actors are utility maximizers. This means that we assume political actors have preferences, and they work to achieve those preferences within the constraints of the institution. The empirical sections will require some basic knowledge of research design and empirical methods. This class will assume no prior knowledge of empirical methods though students should be familiar with basic American political institutions covered in the PLS 105 class.

This class, like many in political science, often deals with subjects that are controversial. Engaging with these issues is an important part of being an informed citizen and as such, we will not shy away from discussing controversial current events. This also means you should never feel embarrassed or afraid to share your opinion, even if it means disagreeing with other students in the class. However, each of us should remember that we have different experiences and different viewpoints. We must always be respectful of other students and other opinions. I take this policy very seriously and have **zero tolerance** for inappropriate, crude, disrespectful, or demeaning comments. I reserve the right to use an appropriate punishment for any student who engages in disrespectful behavior. This may include removal from the class, receiving a zero on participation for the semester, or being reported to university officials. Please speak with me promptly if you feel there is a civility problem in the classroom. See the Bradley Standards of Conduct at <http://www.bradley.edu/campuslife/studenthandbook/policies/conduct/>

Reading

The course has two required books. All books are in the bookstore.

Michael Nelson. 2013. *The Presidency and the Political System*, Tenth Edition. Referred to as “PPS” in the schedule below.

Michael Nelson. 2013. *The Evolving Presidency: Landmark Documents, 1787-2010*, 4th Edition. Referred to as “LD” in the schedule below.

There will also be additional readings that will either be emailed or given out in class. Finally, you are required to read either the Washington Post or New York Times (both can be read online) as well as either politico.com, or thehill.com. All of these are free online, although for the Times and Post you have to register with an email address.

Course Requirements and Other Information

The prerequisite for this course is PLS 105. I will not be enforcing this prereq strictly, but I highly recommend you take 105 prior to taking this course.

The course is both lecture and discussion based. Some days will be mostly lecture, some days will be a mix, and some days will be mostly discussion. In general, about every week at least one day will be reserved for discussing current events in the United States, and understanding how they relate to Congress and other political actors. This is one of the reasons it is important you read the newspaper and one of the other websites.

Readings are assigned for the week and should be completed before class. This ensures that you more fully understand the lecture topics, and that you are able to engage with other students and myself. There are many things I will not cover that will be in the reading, or topics that I will assume you know already from which I will build on. There is a substantial amount of reading. If you fall behind it will be very difficult to catch up, and falling behind is the single easiest way to do poorly in class.

I have a no cell phone or laptop policy. If I see or hear a cell phone the entire class will have a pop-quiz on the spot which will count toward the participation portion of your grade. For the sake of your classmates, please ensure your cell phone is on silent and please do not text in class. I do not allow laptops because experience has shown me they create distractions for other students. Please go to the bookstore and buy a notebook to take notes in.

I will periodically send out emails to the class list. You are automatically subscribed to the list if you

are enrolled in the class through your campus email account. The list will allow me to inform you of changes in assignments, the schedule or to attach additional reading. I cannot send emails out to a non Bradley email account. The Bradley email account is an official means of communication between myself and the students. If you have any questions, please see <http://www.bradley.edu/irt/policies/5.02.html> and/or talk to me.

Grading

There are seven grades for this class: participation, current events, three response papers and a class presentation.

Participation 10%

There is no attendance requirement for the class. If you miss a class for any reason, it is not necessary to tell me. You may miss as many classes as you wish. However, there are some costs to missing class. First, you will miss items that are discussed in class that will be on the test. Second, you will be graded on your participation. In many ways, this class will be run like a graduate seminar. You need to be an active participant, asking questions in class of me, and engaging in discussion with your fellow students. If it appears you have not done the reading for that day, I will note it and lower your participation grade.

Class Presentation and Response Papers, 15%

A group of students will be responsible for leading class discussion every Friday. Students should develop questions and discussion topics to ask of the class. In addition, the students leading discussion will be required to submit a 2-3 response paper to the readings. Both the response paper and discussion will be graded on a 0-5 scale. Each student will lead class discussion two times per semester, and as a result, will turn in three response papers (each worth 5% of the overall grade). Additional details will be provided in class.

Research Paper, 25%

A research paper of approximately 10-15 pages will be due near the end of the semester in class. We will discuss the paper topics in class in a few weeks. A 1-2 page prospectus will be due prior to completion of the assignment. I will provide comments within the week, after which you may schedule meetings with me as you see fit to discuss your paper further. This portion of the assignment is marked as either complete or incomplete. If you choose not to turn in a prospectus, you will be marked down one-third of a letter grade on your final paper (i.e. from a B+ to a B, or B to B-.)

Midterm 25% and Final 25%

The format of the midterm and final will be short answer/essay. There will be constrained choice on the short answer and the essay (meaning you will have to answer 2 of 3 for example). There will be no multiple choice. The short answer/identification will be worth 50% of the test grade, with the essay worth the other 50%. The final will be cumulative. The midterm will be on October 10th in class, and the final will be on Tuesday, December 16th at 2:30 pm.

Misc. Grading Information

I will be happy to regrade anything with the understanding that the grade could be higher or lower than the original grade. In order to have me regrade something, you need to give me a written explanation

of your specific concerns within one week. Do not approach me at the end of class and ask about your specific grade. I do not like this.

Plagiarism and/or cheating will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Anyone caught plagiarizing or cheating will a grade of zero on the assignment and be reported to the Director of Residential Life and Student Judicial System. Please see the Student Handbook and Undergraduate Catalog for Bradley's policies on plagiarism.

You must complete all assignments to pass the class.

Schedule

Part 1 - Introduction and Background

Please note this schedule is tentative. I reserve the right to change it or add or subtract readings or assignments.

Aug. 27-29: Syllabus

Reading: The syllabus

Sept. 1-5: Theory, Research and Studying the presidency

Reading: PPS: 2, Wagner "Who's afraid of rational choice theory?"

Sept. 8-12: Structure, institutional rules, and the Constitution

Reading: PPS: 1, LD: 1-4

Sept. 15-19: Presidential politics in historical context

Reading: PPS: 3-4, LD: 12, 18, 20

Sept. 22-26: Symbolic Leadership

Reading: PPS: 9-10, LD: 8,9, 15

Sept. 29-Oct. 6: Party Leadership

Reading: PPS: 12-13, LD: 27, 44, 48, 55

Oct. 8: Review for Midterm

Oct. 10.: Midterm

Reading: None

Oct. 15-17: Presidents and Congress

Reading: PPS: 15, 18, LD: 12, 14, 34, 38

Oct. 20-24: Presidential elections

Reading: PPS: 7-8, LD: 11, 54, Campbell, "Forecasting Presidential Elections."

Oct. 27-31: Vetoes and Unilateral Power

Reading: PPS: 17, LD: 12, 13, 29, 30, 47

Nov. 3-7: The president and the bureaucracy

Reading: PPS: 14, LD: 25, 45, 52

Nov. 10-14: The president and the judiciary

Reading: PPS: 15, LD: 40, 49, 53

Nov. 17-24: Presidents and foreign policy

Reading: PPS: 19, LD: 35, 36, 50, 55

Dec. 1-5: The two presidencies

Reading: PPS: 4, 5, LD: 10, 17, 21, 31

Dec. 8: Review for Test

Reading: None

Final: Tuesday, Dec. 16 at 2:30 pm