“No man will ever carry out of the Presidency the reputation which carried him into it.” – Thomas Jefferson

“The presidency has made every man who occupied it, no matter how small, bigger than he was; and no matter how big, not big enough for its demands.” – Lyndon B. Johnson

“When you get to be President, there are all those things, the honors, the twenty-one gun salutes, all those things. You have to remember it isn’t for you. It’s for the Presidency.” – Harry S Truman

Objectives: Chief Executive, Commander-in- Chief, Leader of the Free World – this course provides a modern look at the central feature of American government: the Presidency. We will focus particular attention on the “leadership dilemma” – the gap between the expectations that are placed on presidents and the institutions and norms that limit their ability to meet those expectations. What makes a successful president? When are presidents more or less likely to achieve their objectives? How has the pursuit of these objectives and the office at large evolved over time? How do Congress, the courts, and the federal bureaucracies serve as checks on presidential ambitions? In answering these questions we will dive deep into the stylistic and substantive variations observed in different administrations with a particular focus on the tenures of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump. In the end, we will be able to place this unique political institution into the larger framework of American government.
Course Website:

- https://moodle2.sscnet.ucla.edu/course/view/18F-POLSCI140B-1

Office Hours: T 1:00 – 3:00pm, 4258 Bunche Hall

Textbooks: This is a list of books required for this course. Other readings will be posted on the course website.


Attendance Policy:

- Attendance is mandatory. I will not take attendance every day, but I will take attendance occasionally. Prescheduled excused absences should be brought to my attention in the first week. Other absences will only be excused for documented medical and family emergencies.

Grading Policy: Attendance & Quizzes (20%), Midterm 1 (25%), Midterm 2 (30%), Final Project (25%).

Final Project: The First 100 Days

- The “First 100 Days” is a common framework by which to evaluate presidential administrations. Your final project is two-fold: First, I will divide the class into groups of 4 to 5 students who will be assigned a previous presidential administration. As a group you are to design a 5–7 minute presentation detailing the first 100 days of the administration, which you will present on December 4, 2018. Second, each student will then write a 5–7 page paper comparing the first 100 days of either the Obama or Trump administrations with that previous presidential administration. While there will likely be significant overlap substantively between group members, these papers are to be written individually. We will discuss the specifics of this assignment after the first midterm exam.

Important Due Dates:

Midterm #1 ......................... October 28, 2018
Midterm #2 ......................... November 27, 2018
Final Presentations ............... December 4, 2018
Final Paper .............. by December 7, 2018 @11:59:59pm

Academic Honesty:

- Any issues with academic dishonesty will be sent directly to the Dean of Students.
- All work you do for this course is expected to be your own. I encourage you to discuss matters relating to this course with other classmates, friends, family members, and students, but your papers and exam answers must be your own ideas and your own words. If you are having trouble completing an assignment, contact me or the UCLA Undergraduate Writing Center for help before you resort to the use of someone else’s words or ideas without proper attribution. If you are unfamiliar with the University’s policy on academic dishonesty and associated penalties, see www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu. You are responsible for understanding these standards – not knowing that your actions constitute a violation of these policies is not an excuse.
Classroom Policies:

- Cell phone usage is not allowed in class. Please make sure that they are off or on silent BEFORE coming to class.

- I strongly discourage using laptops to take notes. There is a growing body of research which shows that laptops hinder your ability to learn and taking notes by hand is more effective. I reserve the right to amend course policy to prohibit laptops if they become a distraction.

Course Outline & Assigned Readings:

Overview – The American Presidency at a Crossroads ......................... Sept. 27, 2018


Tools of the Trade – Methods for to Studying an Institution ...................... Oct. 2, 2018

△ Abby Long. 2018. “10 Things to Know About Reading a Regression Table.”


Constructing the Office – The Constitutional Presidency ....................... Oct. 4, 2018

- *The Constitution of the United States*


* The American President: Washington to Monroe
From Washington to Hoover – The Early Presidency ................................. Oct. 9, 2018


• The American President: JQ Adams to Polk
• The American President: Taylor to Lincoln
• The American President: Johnson to Arthur
• The American President: Cleveland to Taft
• The American President: Wilson to FDR

From FDR to Trump – The Modern Presidency ................................. Oct. 11, 2018


• The American President: Truman to Ford
• The American President: Carter to Bush

The Road to the White House Pt. 1 – The Primary ................................. Oct. 16, 2018


The Road to the White House Pt. 2 – The Campaign ............................ Oct. 18, 2018


The Road to the White House Pt. 3 – The Election ................................. Oct. 23, 2018


Midterm # 1 – Bring a Scantron! ............................................................ Oct. 28, 2018

Pomp & Circumstance – The Norms and Traditions of the Presidency .................... Oct. 30, 2018


Uphold & Defend – The President & the Courts ................................. Nov. 1, 2018


Advise & Consent – The President & Congress ...........................................Nov. 6, 2018


Faithful Execution – The President & the Bureaucracy & Unitary Action .................Nov. 8, 2018


The Fourth Estate – The President & the Public ............................................Nov. 13, 2018


A Chicken in Every Pot – The President & Domestic Policy  


Commander-in-Chief – The President & Foreign Policy  

* Note: I won’t take attendance on this day if you’re planning on a long vacation, however, I will be lecturing and you are responsible for the content.


No Class – Thanksgiving Break  

When It Hits the Fan – Scandals, Impeachment, and Reputation  


- Note: Just skim Warren (1918) for the list of treasonable offenses.
How to Handle the Readings

- Chapters from other textbooks are uploaded on the course website. Articles from The New York Times and The Washington Post (both behind paywalls) have also been posted. The remaining articles are linked above. If the links are broken, please let me know, but they can all be found through a quick Google. Similar for academic articles – they can all be found on Google Scholar. Reminder, you need to either be using a UCLA internet source or a VPN to access academic journals.

- There are three types of readings listed in the syllabus. I would recommend a different reading strategies for each:

  △ These readings come from political science academic research. These are going to be a little more advanced than most readings you’ve encountered. You are not responsible for knowing every detail about these pieces – I want you to be able to summarize these articles in a very general sense and to think about how they relate to the larger phenomenon we’re discussing. We will go through an example of this in Lecture 2. If you can answer the following questions, you’ve covered that reading in sufficient detail:
  1. What is the question or puzzle interesting the author(s)?
  2. How do they attempt to answer that question?
  3. What data do they use to address that question?
  4. What do they conclude?

  • These are general textbook readings. You should be familiar with these types of readings. These are the readings where I will draw a lot of the class structure (not to mention exam questions).

  ∗ These are contextual and ‘current’ events related articles. These are to provide you with opportunities to think about the course material and apply it to world around us. If you *have* to push some readings until after class, these should be your first choices. That said, they are still fair game – they will provide you with the case studies and examples necessary for papers and exams.
Midterm Previews

• There will be two close-book midterm exams (25% and 30%, respectively). They will both be cumulative to that point in the course. However, the second exam will focus more heavily on the material between the first exam. These exams will test your knowledge of the course material and your ability to apply those concepts to current events. They will consist of a combination of multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answers, and/or brief essays.

• Questions to Help You Study
  1. What is the authors’ main hypothesis?
  2. How do they justify that hypothesis?
  3. What approach do they use to test that hypothesis?
  4. What are the key results of that approach?
  5. How does that relate or conflict with other readings?

• I will attempt to include review questions at the end of each lecture to help you get a feel for the types of questions I like to ask.

• There will NOT be a separate study guide for either exams.

Student Resources

• UCLA Consoling and Psychological Services
  – 24/7 Crisis Counseling: (310) 825-0768
  – UCLA CAPS Services

• UCLA Undergraduate Writing Center
  – Appointment Scheduling: (310) 206-1320
  – UCLA Writing Center

• UCSB Presidency Project
  – The Presidency Project has data on presidential approval, campaigns, States of the Union, etc.

• Best Presidential Biographies
  – Stephen Floyd’s Blog on Best Presidential Biographies.