

**SYLLABUS**  
**Presidential Politics**  
BLHV-461-01

Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies Program, Georgetown University, Spring 2016

Day and Time: Tuesdays – 5:20 p.m. to 7:50 p.m.

Location: TBA

Instructor: Ambassador Paul A. Russo

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**The syllabus is subject to change.**

Course Summary

This course will focus on the presidential decision-making process in crisis situations -- from John F. Kennedy to Donald Trump -- with primary emphasis on foreign policy challenges. *Presidential Politics* offers an insider's view of how White House policy is shaped, both from a historical perspective and also as it is driven by outside events. Special attention will be given to weekly classroom discussions based on analysis of a variety of reliable news media formats. Throughout the course, we will scrutinize the style and substance of modern day presidents – their strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures. We will examine the impact of presidential decisions on the Cuban Missile Crisis, Watergate, the Viet Nam War, the Iranian Hostage Crisis, the end of the Cold War, 9/11, the Iraq War, and the Iranian Nuclear Agreement, as well as the current policies of the Trump Administration. The course will cover the 24-hour news cycle, and the impact of television, talk radio and social media on the governing process. Attention will be given to the presidential personnel process, examining the mechanics and the politics of filling over 3,500 presidential positions in the federal government. We will also review the U.S. Senate confirmation process for senior presidential appointments.

Throughout the semester, we will focus on how the character of a president and the decisions he makes influence policy; how the personal qualities of the President create an overall culture within the White House, how that culture influences the manner in which issues are addressed and how decisions are made; and how the struggle between practical political considerations and moral and ethical principles affect decision-making by a president and his staff. We will also consider whether the tremendous advances in technology have enhanced or hampered the President's ability to govern, and whether or not instant communication is desirable in our democracy.

Students are expected to keep abreast of current affairs, and also to read historical materials on modern U.S. presidents.

Students will be required to write two papers:

- (1) a 500 – 750 word paper due the second week of class, and
- (2) an eight-page course paper, (due on Class XIV), on one of the modern U.S. Presidents – examining a foreign policy crisis he encountered, and how it was resolved.

Course Objectives

By taking this course, students should gain a better understanding of the presidential election process, and the role of the President of the United States as it has evolved over the last fifty-plus years.

This course will compare and contrast the decision-making process of modern presidents and will focus on the following:

- 1) How the personal qualities of the President, his character or lack thereof, create an overall culture within the White House, and how that culture influences the manner in which issues are addressed and decisions are made;
- 2) How the character of a presidential candidate, and the decisions he makes -- vice presidential choice, campaign tone, etc. -- can influence the outcome of an election;
- 3) How the struggle between practical political considerations and moral and ethical principles affects decision-making by the President and his staff;
- 4) If advances in technology have enhanced or hampered the President's ability to govern, and whether or not instant communication is desirable;
- 5) With regard to personnel, to what extent do special interests play a role in the political appointment process, what impact does that have on policy, and is personnel policy?

### Learning Goals

After completing this course, a student should be able to:

- Have a clear understanding of how the U.S. presidential nomination process works, and the role of the electoral college in selecting a president;
- Recognize the affects and consequences of 21<sup>st</sup> Century media and the 24-hour news cycle on the electoral and governing process;
- Assess the credibility and veracity of stories reported in both the traditional media and social media;
- Comprehend more fully the inner workings of the presidential appointment process and Senate confirmation;
- Understand the foreign policy decision-making process employed by modern era presidents in crisis situations;
- Evaluate from a historical perspective the problems that our political system is currently experiencing;
- Listen critically to presidential candidates/elected officials, and understand more clearly what they are really saying;
- Know the basic structure of the White House, and the role and function of senior White House staff and the Cabinet;
- Analyze how presidential policy is influenced.

### Course Readings

Required Reading:

Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days - A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Norton, W. W. & Company, Incorporated, December 01, 1999 (ISBN 0393318346)

Stephen Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal*, University Press of Kansas, January 18, 2008 (ISBN 9780700615759)

(NOTE: TEXTS THAT ARE NOT LISTED HERE WILL BE AVAILABLE ON BLACKBOARD)

Principal Readings:

Students will be required to read, on a daily basis, either the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times*, with focus on major articles under “Politics,” “The White House,” and “Congress,” and be prepared to discuss major events in class. These articles will be discussed at the beginning of each session, and students will link current events to theoretical issues. In addition, on a weekly basis, current affairs reading and other material may be assigned/distributed for discussion in the following week’s class.

Video Requirements:

*All the President’s Men* (1976) 139 minutes (available at the Lauinger Library)

*Argo* (2012) 121 minutes (available at the Lauinger Library)

Suggested Readings (Optional):

Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, *All the President’s Men* (Nixon), Simon & Schuster, 1994

George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, Random House, 2010

Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent - The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, Knopf Doubleday, 1991

Bill Clinton, *My Life: The Presidential Years*, Knopf Doubleday, 2005

David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, Random House, 1993

William Manchester, *The Glory and the Dream*, Bantam Books, 1975

Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, Knopf Doubleday, 2008

Aki Peritz and Eric Rosenbach, *Find, Fix, Finish – Inside the Counterterrorism Campaigns That Killed Bin Laden and Devastated Al-Qaeda*, Public Affairs, a Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2012

Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, Simon & Schuster, 1990

Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power*, Simon & Schuster, 1994

Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House*, Simon & Schuster, 2002

Theodore H. White, *America in Search of Itself*, Harper, 1982

Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, Simon & Schuster, September 27, 2010

Course Requirements and Basis for Grades

**Class Participation (20%)**

Students will have an opportunity to take part in weekly discussions. Aside from actively participating in class discussions, students should be prepared to discuss the articles in current affairs readings, as

well as pertinent articles in the *Washington Post* and/or *New York Times*. This discussion normally will be held at the beginning of the class.

### **Mid-term Exam (20%)**

The take-home mid-term will consist of short essay questions covering material presented in the first half of the semester.

### **Papers (35%)**

#### Paper #1 (5%)

Students will be required to write a 500 – 750 word paper – examining a current international issue and evaluating the media coverage from two different, credible sources: either written (*New York Times/Wall Street Journal/Washington Post/Politico/*) or broadcast media. Paper will address whether or not there are discrepancies in the reporting of the facts. Is the coverage slanted?

#### Paper #2 (30%)

Students will be required to write an 8 page paper on one of the modern U.S. Presidents. You will identify a crisis situation that occurred during that president's administration, and then examine how the President managed the crisis, analyze his decision-making process in addressing the crisis, and consider the ramifications of his decision (excluding John F. Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis, which will be examined in detail in class). A one-page paper, outlining the chosen topic (due Week VI), will be worth 2% of the grade, and completion of one session utilizing the resources available at the School's Writing Center in the Lauinger Library, will be worth 1% of your grade (see <http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/> with regard to scheduling appointments).

### **Final Exam (25%)**

Open-book final exam. Students will respond to short essay questions intended to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the material presented throughout the course.

### Grading

Grades will be determined as follows:

- 93% to 100% = A
- 90% to 92% = A minus
- 87% to 89% = B plus
- 83% to 86% = B
- 80% to 82% = B minus
- 77% to 79% = C plus
- 73% to 76% = C
- 70% to 72% = C minus
- 67% to 69% = D plus
- 63% to 66% = D
- 62% and below = F

Grades will be computed based on performance on the course assignments. The final percentages will be rounded to the nearest integer.

### Attendance Policy

Students are required to attend all class meetings. Requests for absences will be considered only for actual emergency situations.

Pursuant to BALS program policy, students with two or more absences may receive a failing grade for the course.

### Extreme weather, Emergencies, and Instructional Continuity

During inclement weather or other emergencies on a day when we are scheduled to meet face-to-face, check the university's Web site or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open. If the university is open, this class will meet. If the university is closed, this class will meet through distance means such as online videoconferencing; check your e-mail for a message from me on how we will proceed in that situation. Due dates for written assignments submitted through Blackboard will not be changed due to campus closings.

The university has the capability to send text messages and recorded messages about emergencies to cell phones and other mobile devices. Sign up on MyAccess.

### Plagiarism

In accord with university policy, all incidents of suspected plagiarism or other Honor Code violations will be reported to the Honor Council without fail.

If the Honor Council finds that a student has plagiarized or has violated the Honor Code in any other way, the student will receive a grade of F for the course.

### Georgetown Honor System

All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. We assume you have read the honor code material located at <http://scs.georgetown.edu/academic-affairs/honor-code>, and in particular have read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, What is Plagiarism, Sanctioning Guidelines, and Expedited Sanctioning Process. Papers in this course will all be submitted to turnitin.com for checking.

Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge:

*In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

### Late Submissions and Incompletes

As a rule, late submissions and incompletes will not be accepted.

### Style/Citation System

Papers should be done in typical research fashion, using appropriate and specific citations. Students must use MLA citation style. Papers are to be formatted to the following guidelines: double-spaced, using 12 point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins.

### Classroom Etiquette

Please turn off personal communication devices (cell phone, Blackberry, etc.) while class is in session. Students are welcome to bring laptop computers to class for note taking and class-related work.

### Consultations with Students

While your instructor does not have set office hours, he will be glad to meet with individual students at mutually arranged times.

## Disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability who requires accommodations or if you think you may have a disability and want to inquire about accommodations, please contact the Academic Resource Center at 202-687-8354 or arc@georgetown.edu.

## Turnitin.com

Students acknowledge that by taking this course all required papers can be submitted for a Textual Similarity Review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.

## Policy Accommodating Students' Religious Observances

The following is university policy: Georgetown University promotes respect for all religions. Any student who is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, presentation, or assignment on a given day because of the observance of a major religious holiday or related travel shall be excused and provided with the opportunity to make up, without unreasonable burden, any work that has been missed for this reason and shall not in any other way be penalized for the absence or rescheduled work. Students will remain responsible for all assigned work. Students should notify professors in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with their classes.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE OUTLINE**

The following schedule is subject to change. Additional readings will be distributed in class or available through electronic sources. The instructor will be available by appointment throughout the semester to discuss the 10-paper topics with students.

### **Week I**

**September 5, 2017**

#### Topics:

#### **Introduction and Overview Communication – Advanced Technology**

In the modern age, the use of television has been a key part of governing, and also a major source of news and information for the public. With changes in technology, and the onset of talk radio and the Internet, has the symbiotic relationship between the media and the President been altered? The first responsibility of a news organization is to make a profit. News as “conflict” sells – “if it bleeds it leads.” What are the consequences of the recent trend towards blending news with entertainment? How do 21st century technological advances, coupled with the 24-hour news cycle, affect the way our political system functions? Does it help or hinder the President’s ability to govern? What role does it play in the presidential race?

#### Readings:

- Thomas R. Dye, Harmon, Zeigler, Late, *The Irony of Democracy – An Uncommon Introduction to American Politics*, Wadsworth, January 04, 2008, pp. 123-127 (reading to be made available to students prior to class)

**NOTE: First Paper Due at the Beginning of Class**Topics:**Structure of the White House  
Personnel and the Senate Confirmation Process**

The Government has become so vast that a large staff of White House assistants is necessary to manage it. What goes to the President has to be organized and limited in some fashion. This process creates powerful assistants. How is the Executive Office of the President organized, and what are the roles – who does what?

Is personnel: policy? What coalition elected the President? What did he promise he would do? What do events dictate? From where does the President draw his appointees? Who must obtain confirmation by the Senate, and how does the confirmation process work? To what extent does the “Iron Triangle” influence the process?

Readings: (to be made available prior to class)

- Thomas R. Dye, Harmon, Zeigler, Late, *The Irony of Democracy – An Uncommon Introduction to American Politics*, pp. 217-232; and
- Thomas R. Dye, Harmon, Zeigler, Late, *The Irony of Democracy – An Uncommon Introduction to American Politics*, pp. 245-251

Topics:**Analysis of Party Conventions  
The Power of Incumbency**

Discussion of Chapter II (pp. 27-58), “Presidential Leadership in Political Time,” from Stephen Skowronek’s book, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal*

Topic:

John F. Kennedy – Examination of the Decision-Making Process Employed By Kennedy Leading Up to the Bay of Pigs Invasion and During the Cuban Missile Crisis

Readings:

- Inaugural Address, President John F. Kennedy, Washington, D.C., January 20, 1961, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-034-002.aspx>
- Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days - A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*

**Week V      Power of the Presidency**

**October 3, 2017**

Topics:

**The Constitutional Powers of the President  
Presidential Powers of Persuasion  
The Power of Ideas vs. Political Stagecraft**

Readings:

Readings to be distributed in class or available through electronic sources.

**Week VI      Lyndon Johnson**

**October 10, 2017**

Topics:

The Transfer of Power after the Kennedy Assassination, and the Continuation of JFK Policies  
Working with the Congress -- the Passage of Civil Rights Legislation  
How Decisions Evolved -- the Tragedy of Vietnam  
The Turmoil of the 1960's – Campus Unrest, Race Riots, Deepening Involvement in Vietnam  
Senator Eugene McCarthy and the New Hampshire Primary

Readings:

- Excerpts from David Halberstam's book, *The Best and the Brightest*, Random House, 1993 (reading to be made available to students prior to class)

**NOTE:** Take Home Mid-Term Exam to be Distributed

**Week VII      Richard Nixon**

**October 17, 2017**

Topics:

“Law and Order” and the Emergence of the “Silent Majority”  
National Security and the Pentagon Papers  
Nixon goes to China – Forging a New Relationship  
Watergate Break-In and Cover-Up

Movie/Readings:

- *All the President's Men* (139 minutes): This movie should be seen in its entirety prior to this class. Copies are available at the Lauinger Library.
- Excerpts from Richard Reeves' book, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House*, Simon & Schuster, 2002 (reading to be made available to students prior to class).

**NOTE:** Take Home Mid-Term Exam Due No Later Than the Beginning of Class.

**Week VIII      Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter**

**October 24, 2017**

Topics:

Nixon's Resignation and his Pardon by Gerald Ford – Profile in Courage or Political Deal?



Iowa Caucuses and New Hampshire Primary -- Their Roles in the Presidential Selection Process  
Ford's Defeat and the Election of Jimmy Carter, The Iran Hostage Crisis

Movie/Readings:

- *Argo* (121 minutes): This movie should be seen in its entirety prior to class.
- Stephen Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal*, Chapter III, pp. 79-116

**NOTE: Due Date for Topic and Outline for 8 Page Course Final Paper** (2% of grade – instructor is available earlier in the semester for discussion regarding topics.)

**Week IX      Ronald Reagan      October 31, 2017**

Topics:

Political Realignment?  
Reduced Government/National Defense  
Foreign Policy:  
“Mr. Gorbachev Tear Down This Wall”  
Reagan/ Gorbachev Summits  
The Iran Contra Affair

Readings:

- Speech by President Ronald Reagan, Brandenburg Gate, West Berlin, June 12, 1987 (handout)

**Week X      George Herbert Walker Bush      November 7, 2017**

Topics:

George Herbert Walker Bush -- An Extension of Reagan Policies?  
The Persian Gulf War/Liberation of Kuwait – Why not Baghdad?

Readings:

- Excerpts from Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft's book, *America and the World: Conversations on the Future of American Foreign Policy*, Basic Books, September 01, 2009 (reading to be made available to students prior to class)

**Week XI      Bill Clinton      November 14, 2017**

Topics:

Success and Failure:      Welfare Reform, NAFTA, the Economy, Healthcare  
Bosnia      The Role of the First Lady and the Vice President  
Bombing of Serbia      Scandal/Impeachment/Acquittal

Readings:

- Excerpts from Bill Clinton's book, *My Life: The Presidential Years*, Knopf Doubleday, 2005 (reading to be made available to students prior to class)

**Week XII      George W. Bush  
2008 Barack Obama Election**

**November 21, 2017**

Topics:

Examination of the Decision-Making Process Employed by George W. Bush in Response to 9/11 -- Leading up to the Invasion of Afghanistan and then Iraq

Examination of President Obama's Election in 2008, Decision-Making Process on the Future U.S. Role in Iraq, and Strategy for Executing the War in Afghanistan

Readings:

- Excerpts from George W. Bush's book, *Decision Points*, Random House, 2010 (reading to be made available to students prior to class)
- Select readings from one or more of Bob Woodward's books on President George W. Bush (readings to be made available to students prior to class)

**Week XIII      President Barack Obama**

**November 28, 2017**

Topics:

Analysis of the Obama Decision-Making Process Dealing with the Financial Crisis, Healthcare Reform, the Decision to Intervene in Libya/the Role of NATO in Removing Colonel Khadafi from Power, Addressing the ISIL Threat

Readings:

Select readings from Bob Woodward's book, *Obama's Wars*, Simon & Schuster, September 27, 2010 (readings to be made available to students prior to class)

**Week XIV      2016 Presidential Race and the Trump Administration**

**December 5, 2017**

Topics:

An Analysis of the Presidential Primary Cycle and the General Election – Did Donald Trump Win or Did Hillary Clinton Lose?

Discussion: Is our Political System Broken, Or Are We Experiencing Democracy at Work?

**NOTE: Eight-Page Course Paper Due**

**Week XV      Open-Book Final Exam**

**December 12, 2017**