SYLLABUS
The Modern U.S. Presidency – Fifty Years of Political Evolution
BLHV-461-01

Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies Program, Georgetown University, Spring 2015
Day and Time: Mondays – 5:20 p.m. to 7:50 p.m.
Location: TBA
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The syllabus is subject to change.

Course Summary

This course will present an overview of the American political process, with focus on the executive
branch of the U.S. Government, comparing and contrasting the role and style of modern presidents and
their decision-making process in dealing with crisis situations – from John F. Kennedy to Barack Obama -
-with emphasis on foreign policy decisions. We will also consider the changing role of the U.S. President
at the beginning of the 21st Century, specifically discussing the impact of terrorism, two wars, and the
financial crisis, on the governing process. The course offers an insider’s perspective on how major events
shape both foreign and domestic White House policy. We will examine America’s new role in a rapidly
changing world, with emphasis on how the White House is affected by modern technology, the 24-hour
news cycle, and globalization. The course will also scrutinize the functions of key White House staff and
their expanding role in the governing process, and consider the mechanics and the politics of staffing over
3,500 senior federal positions, including the U.S. Senate confirmation process.

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 an 8-page course paper (due the last day of class) on one of the modern
U.S. Presidents – examining a crisis he encountered, and how it was resolved.

Students will be required to participate in a mock White House National Security meeting, taking the role
of a key Presidential advisor and making recommendations with regard to a critical decision faced by the
President. Students will be required to write a one-page paper in the form of a Memorandum to the
President, defending their recommendations.

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 years.

This course will compare and contrast the decision-making process of modern presidents and
presidential candidates, 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 21st 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:


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


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

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

Suggested Readings, continued


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


Course Requirements and Basis for Grades

**Class Participation / Mock National Security Meeting (25%)**

Students will have an opportunity to take part in weekly discussions, and participate in one class mock White House National Security meeting. Aside from actively taking part in class discussions, students should be prepared to discuss the articles in the Current Affairs Readings, as well as pertinent articles in the *Washington Post* and/or *New York Times*. This discussion will normally be held at the beginning of the class.

For their presentation within the mock National Security meeting, students will prepare a one-page paper defending their recommendations. The paper will be in the form of a Memorandum to The President.

**Mid-term Exam (25%)**

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

**Paper (25%)**

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 VIII), 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/](http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/) with regard to scheduling appointments).
Final Exam (25%)

In-class 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.

Plagiarism

Students must document the sources of all information and ideas in their assignments. All quotations must be identified as such, using quotation marks, and referencing the source of the quotation. Anything less than these standards will constitute an act of plagiarism. Work that appears to have been plagiarized or otherwise violates the Honor Code (see below) will be reported to Georgetown’s Honor Council. If the Council finds that the work violates the University’s standards of academic honesty, the work will receive a grade of zero for the assignment for the first offense; a second violation will earn an F for the course. The Honor Council may impose sanctions of its own as well.

Georgetown Honor System

All students are expected to follow Georgetown University’s honor code unconditionally. Please read and familiarize yourself with the honor code material located at [http://scs.georgetown.edu/academic-affairs/honor-code](http://scs.georgetown.edu/academic-affairs/honor-code), with particular attention to the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, “What is Plagiarism,” “Sanctioning Guidelines,” and “Expedited Sanctioning Process.” Fulfilling the requirements of this course means that, in submitting material, you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge:

_In pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and to uphold the Georgetown University honor system: To be honest in every academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together._
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.

Note: To meet university requirements regarding instructional continuity, in the event campus is closed due to inclement weather, class will be held via teleconference, with call-in details to be sent out via email.

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. No specific citation system is required, but your citations must be consistent in 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.

Disability

If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.
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

FIRST CLASS ONLY: Wednesday, January 7, 2015

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:

- Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, pp. 1-47

Week II

Monday, January 12, 2015

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?
Week II, continued

Readings:

- Thomas R. Dye, Harmon, Zeigler, Late, *The Irony of Democracy – An Uncommon Introduction to American Politics*, pp. 217-232 (reading to be made available to students prior to class)

- Thomas R. Dye, Harmon, Zeigler, Late, *The Irony of Democracy – An Uncommon Introduction to American Politics*, pp. 245-251 (reading to be made available to students prior to class)

*NOTE: January 19, 2015 – Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday – NO CLASSES*

Week III

Monday, January 26, 2015

Topics:

Analysis of Party Conventions
The Power of Incumbency


Additional Readings:

- Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, pp. 48-98


Week IV

Crisis Situations and the Decision-Making Process

Monday, February 2, 2015

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:


- Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days - A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*

Week V  Power of the Presidency  Monday, February 9, 2015

Topics:

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

Readings:

- Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, pp. 133-183

Additional readings to be distributed in class or available through electronic sources.

NOTE:  February 16, 2015 – Presidents Day Holiday – NO CLASSES.

Week VI  Lyndon Johnson  Monday, February 23, 2015

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)

- Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, pp. 183-233

- Additional readings to be distributed in class or available through electronic sources.

NOTE:  Take Home Mid-Term Exam to be Distributed.
Week VII  Richard Nixon  Monday, March 2, 2015

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.
- Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, pp. 233-283

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

NOTE: Spring Break – March 6 to 16, 2015 (no class March 9)

Week VIII  Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter  Monday, March 16, 2015

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 this class.
- Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, pp. 283-333
- Additional readings to be distributed in class or available through electronic sources.

NOTE: Due Date for Topic and Outline for 8 Page Course Final Paper Due Class 13 (2% of grade – instructor is available earlier in the semester for discussion regarding topics.)

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)
- Bob Woodward, Obama’s Wars, pp. 333 – 390

Additional readings to be distributed in class or available through electronic sources.

NOTE: Assignments for Class XII mock National Security meeting will be made, group discussions will take place, and one page paper guidelines will be reviewed.

NOTE: Easter Break – April 1 – April 7, 2015 (no class April 5)

Week X  George Herbert Walker Bush  Monday, March 30, 2015

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)
- Additional readings to be distributed in class or available through electronic sources.

Week XI  Bill Clinton  Monday, April 13, 2015

Topics:

Success and Failure -- Welfare Reform, NAFTA, the Economy, Healthcare
Bosnia
Bombing of Serbia
The Role of the First Lady and the Vice President
Scandal/Impeachment/Acquittal
Monday, April 13, 2015, continued

NOTE: One page National Security “Memorandum to the President” paper should be submitted electronically by 5:00 p.m. on the Friday following this class (April 17).

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)
- Additional readings to be distributed in class or available through electronic sources.

Week XII  George W. Bush
2008 Barack Obama Election

Monday, April 20, 2015

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

In-Class Mock National Security Council Meeting

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  Barack Obama

Monday, April 27, 2015

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
An Analysis of 2014 Mid-Term Elections
Discussion: Is our Political System Broken, Or Are We Experiencing Democracy at Work?

NOTE: Eight-Page Course Paper Due
Week XIV Final Exam

In-Class Final Exam will be scheduled on the assigned final exam date issued for this course by the Registrar.