GOVT 605: Seminar on the Presidency

Fall 2015 - Innovation Hall 330; Th 7:20-10:00 PM

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Course Description:
This is a research seminar and is intended to serve as a broad survey of the political science literature on presidential and executive branch politics. Among American political institutions, the office of the presidency is perhaps the most visible and widely commented upon. In contrast to what we see from the media’s treatment of the president, this seminar will explore contemporary theoretical and empirical research on the American presidency (as the institution that aids and constrains the president). The central focus of the course will be on the U.S. presidency, but much of what we discuss will have relevance for the study of executive politics more generally, especially in separation of powers systems, like the U.S states. The reading assignments in this class serve a dual purpose. One purpose is to establish the foundation of contemporary study of the American presidency. Second, they will help train advanced graduate students in the major research questions which are now generating publications and discussion among presidential scholars and institutional theorists more broadly within the political science community. By the end of this course, you should have a better understanding of the nature of research on the presidency.

Each week’s “recommended” readings are meant to provide further resources for those of you interested in exploring a topic in more depth, and should be especially helpful for those writing a research paper. Of course, no single course can cover all topics related to the presidency and there are a number of important topics that we will not cover (e.g., institutional decision-making, the relationship between the presidency and the courts, gubernatorial politics). If you wish to explore these topics, please come to office hours and I can help direct you to some great presidency resources.

Prerequisite: GOVT 510: American Government and Politics.
Note: There are different requirements for MA and PhD students. Please read carefully.
Course Goals:
By the end of this course, each student should be able to:

- Understand and evaluate classic and theoretical works on American executive politics
- Understand and appreciate the separation-of-powers in American government and form opinions on the role of the president and executive branch in this system

PhD students should be additionally prepared to:

- Conduct original empirical research on a topic related to the president or the federal executive branch

Course Requirements:
This course is a seminar and individual class sessions will be discussion-based. Although the instructor will spend some time during each meeting introducing the material and perhaps clarifying technical aspects of the readings, the primary purpose of our meetings is for student-led critique and discussion of the required readings. Given the nature of the course, the readings are at times numerous and detailed.\footnote{You’ll notice that there are many “required” books. These are all essential bookshelf material for PhD students, but I understand that it might be financially burdensome to purchase all of these books, especially all at once. I have thus placed all books on 4-hour reserve at the Fairfax library. You may also coordinate sharing copies of books amongst yourselves. But, please plan ahead. All required readings must be completed by the day of assignment. “I didn’t have the book” is never a valid excuse for not reading required material.} If you find that you are having trouble keeping up with the readings, feel free to contact the instructor for advice. In addition, you may wish to coordinate with other students for help with collective notes, which are encouraged especially for students planning to take the PhD qualifying examination in American Politics.

A necessary requirement for this type of course is that students attend every class. Absence from more than one class – unless a student has a documented emergency – is considered unacceptable. With each absence past the first, a student may be penalized a letter grade, and will be encouraged to drop the class. Work commitments, vacation, and travel are not documented emergencies, and if these conflict with class, you should strongly consider dropping and taking the course when it better fits your schedule. In addition, any absence must be reported to the instructor prior to the beginning of class.

The following are components of the requirements for and evaluation of ALL students in this course:

- Class Participation is required to make the seminar run smoothly. Students should read all of the required readings and think about them before arriving to a class meeting. Please see the companion notes on successful participation posted on the course Board site. Participation includes both raising and responding to questions regarding the readings and being attentive to the thoughts and criticisms of fellow participants. Advanced graduate students need not be coerced into engaging the literature and fellow seminar participants. Discussions, while focused on criticism, will remain constructive and productive throughout. 25%
To facilitate the desired levels of participation, each student is responsible for individual or cooperative Seminar Leadership. **Twice** during the semester (once in the first half, and once in the second half), a student will be required to type up a 4-5 page *synthesis* of the week’s readings and at least 10 key questions for discussion and submit these materials to the class by 5 PM the Wednesday before class. These materials are to be emailed to the instructor, who will then distribute to the class via the readings website. This student (or students – some weeks will have more than one seminar leader) will also prepare a 10-15 minute introduction to the topic’s readings at the beginning of class, which the instructor will augment as needed. Your synthesis and the discussion questions you develop should explore the themes and controversies in the literature about the topic, and raise questions for discussion about how that week’s theoretical approaches fit the broader scope of the course. Please see the “Participation Guidelines” handout posted on the readings website. **20%**

• Each student is required to complete an *Assessment of Course Readings* (due 12/14). This informal assessment should specify a) those readings that have been especially useful and reasons why, b) those readings that should be dropped from future versions of the course and why, and c) what you have read outside of this course that should be added to this syllabus. Completion of this assessment will earn you **5%** of the final course grade.

In addition to those components mandatory for all students, students must choose (by Friday, September 25) whether they wish to write a research paper **OR** take midterm and final examinations. Political Science PhD students **are required** to take the “paper track,” but MA and MPA students can choose between that option and an “exam track.” Once an MA or MPA student chooses either to take exams or write a research paper, they cannot, under any circumstances, change to the other track. The following are components of the two separate “tracks”:

• Paper Track **(required for PhD students)**

Choose a research question in presidential/executive branch politics, broadly speaking, and complete an original research project addressing your chosen question. The final product should take the form of a conference paper/journal article. The paper should be about 25-30 pages in length, contain a review of the relevant literature, and be written in the professional style of the American Political Science Association. You may use whatever methodology you feel is most appropriate for your question and which you feel qualified to implement. The paper will be due in several stages:

- **Friday, September 25** (by 5:00 pm in my mailbox, or via email): Research design. 5-7 pages identifying your research question, a brief description of the literature relevant to your question, the method of analysis you intend to employ, and any data or historical sources you will use to evaluate your hypotheses.
- **Friday, November 6** (by 5:00 pm in my mailbox, or via email): First draft. At least 12 pages with initial drafts of all of the elements in the paper: research question, literature review, and theory should be well-developed.
- **Friday, December 4** (by 5:00 pm in my mailbox, or via email): Second draft. All required elements of paper should be complete in draft form. The paper will be distributed to all other students in class – students (including “exam track” students –
this assignment will be reflected in your participation grade) will read each other’s papers and come prepared with at least 3 written questions per paper for class on December 10.

– Thursday, December 17 (by 5:00 pm in my mailbox or via email): Final paper due. You should address questions and comments raised during in-class discussions when preparing your final paper.

The paper is due in multiple stages, but will be graded holistically upon final submission, taking into consideration the quality of the research design, first draft, second draft, and in-class presentation. 50%

• Exam Track

For this option, you will be required to complete take-home midterm and final examinations. For each assessment, you will be required to answer two (out of a pool of more than that) questions in 5-7 pages per question. You will be expected to refer primarily to the literature covered in the course, but you can use outside sources if you wish. The exams are open books and open notes, so your answers should be well thought out and written intelligently. You will not be allowed to work collaboratively on these exams. The following are the dates for the exams:

– Midterm Exam will be distributed in class on October 8 and will be due a week later, by 7:20 pm on October 15. 25%
– Final Exam will be distributed in class on December 10 and will be due a week later, by 7:20 pm on December 17. 25%

Grade Distribution:

| Class Participation | 25% |
| Seminar Leadership   | 20% |
| Assessment of Course Readings | 5% |
| Research Design/Exams | 50% |

Required Books:


**Topics and Schedule of Readings**

The following is a tentative schedule for the course. This schedule is meant to give you a sense of the topic(s) to be covered on a given day. It is also meant to guide you if you wish to complete readings ahead of time. You are required to have read the assigned reading by the week listed below.

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**Week 1 (9/3)**

**STUDYING THE PRESIDENCY**

**NO MEETING — AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE**

Read:


- Browse the APSA conference program ([http://goo.gl/SDVCIf](http://goo.gl/SDVCIf)) for a paper on the presidency. You can most easily search by division — “Presidents and Executive Politics” is Division 23. Choose a paper that you find most interesting and read it (either download from the conference site, or email an author to see if they can send you a copy if it’s not posted).

- Write a short summary of the article, focusing on the following questions:

  1. What is the main question the author is asking?
2. What motivates the question/why is the author asking the question?
3. What is the primary expectation, hypothesis, or claim the author seeks to assess?
4. What methods of investigation has the author used to evaluate the claim?
5. What are the primary findings? Were the expectations met?
6. What are your criticisms of the research?

Week 2 (9/10)

**Presidential Elections**

**Required**


**Recommended**


Week 3 (9/17)

**Presidential Power and Leadership**

**Required**
Week 4 (9/24)

**Presidential Approval and Public Opinion**

**Required**


**Recommended**


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**Week 5 (10/1)**

**Presidential Responsiveness**

**Required**


**Recommended**

Week 6 (10/8)

**THE PRESIDENCY AND AMERICAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT**

*Required*

- Rogowski, Jon C. Forthcoming. “Presidential Influence in an Era of Congressional Domi-
nance.” *American Political Science Review*.

*Recommended*

and Illusion—of an Executive-centered Democracy.” In *The Oxford Handbook of American Po-
- Scott, James C. 2000. *Presidents, Parties and the State: A Party System Perspective on Demo-

Week 7 (10/15)

**MIDTERM EXAM DUE — NO CLASS**

Week 8 (10/22)

**THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS**

*Required*

ers.” *American Journal of Political Science*.

*Recommended*

Political Science Review 93 (3): 519-534.

Week 9 (10/29)

Presidential Bargaining

Required


Recommended

Week 10 (11/5)

THE UNILATERAL PRESIDENCY

Required


Recommended


Week 11 (11/12)

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: MANAGING THE BUREAUCRACY

Required


Recommended


Week 12 (11/19)

**Presidential Appointments**

**Required**


**Recommended**

◦ Cameron, Charles M., Albert D. Cover, and Jeffrey A. Segal. 1990. “Senate Voting on Supreme Court Nominees: A Neoinstitutional Model.” *The American Political Science Review* 84 (Jun.): 525-534.
Week 13 (11/26)

Thanksgiving Break

Week 14 (12/3)

The President and Domestic Policy

Required


Recommended

Week 15 (12/10)

**The President and Foreign Policy**

**Required**


We will also discuss student papers this week. All students should read the distributed papers and come prepared with 3 written questions for each author about their papers.

**Recommended**

Additional Concerns

Syllabus
This syllabus is a tentative guide for the course. I reserve the right to make announced changes to this document and will distribute these changes in class and on the course website. Each student will be responsible for all announcements and materials covered in class.

Class Conduct
Class atmosphere will be quite relaxed. Just a few guidelines to make sure:

- Arriving a few minutes late is tolerated as long as you make an effort to minimize the disturbance for other students.
- Eating and drinking in class should be reduced to a minimum. It is not forbidden, but please make sure that you are not disturbing others.
- Turn off all cell phones (or don’t even bring them).
- No email, IMs, or web browsing on computers during class.
- If you have to leave a class early, please let me know in advance. It is very rude to simply walk out in the middle of a discussion.

Disabilities and Accommodations
Please let me know within the first week of class if you require assistance or special consideration. I can make accommodations for those who need them but must be informed of the need in advance. Any requests for accommodation based on a disability must be arranged through the Office of Disability Services (ODS). http://ods.gmu.edu/

Academic Integrity
All work completed in your name must be yours and yours alone. Any work you borrow or ideas you gather from other sources must be cited properly. Please see me if you are concerned about proper citation style. Any attempt to present someone else’s work as your own will be met with the harshest consequences. You will receive an F for the assignment and an F for the course. Furthermore, notification of, and supporting documentation for, the violation will be forwarded to the appropriate university administrators.

Enrollment Statement
Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Scheduled adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes.

Last Day to Add: 9/8/15
Last Day to Drop: 10/02/15

Please note, after the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons. Undergraduate Students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.
Other Useful Campus Resources:

Writing Center
A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; http://writingcenter.gmu.edu

University Libraries
http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
703.993.2380; http://caps.gmu.edu

University Policies
The University Catalog, http://catalog.gmu.edu, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.