POLS 474: Executive Politics and the Presidency
Mon., Wed. and Fri. 3:00-3:50 PM
Instructor: Dr. Kevin Parsneau
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Course Description:
The American President is an enigmatic figure in U.S. politics, both as a solitary figure of leadership, and as an administrator responsible for the bureaucratic machinery that does the daily work of government. Presidents have held the center of attention in American politics since the framers debated the role for the chief executive in their republican design and up to the modern position as the focus of public and media attention. Presidents have been blamed or credited for the performance of the whole government, even as the President’s control over different levers of power has been tenuous and unclear. The public expects great leadership from its presidents and historic eras in U.S. politics are identified with individual presidents, but political scientists have noted wide variations in the abilities of individual presidents to exercise power. Some conclude that presidents have become so powerful that they threaten the republican nature of the government while others fear that they have become so weak that they can not meet democratic expectations.

This course provides students with the basic information needed to understand the role of presidents, and it presents students with the on-going debates about the Presidency. The course begins by analyzing the constitutional and institution position, and the evolution of the role of the President. It then examines the relationship between the President and the public, and between the President and other political institutions such as the executive branch, Congress and the judiciary. It concludes with a discussion of the President’s role in setting policy and presidential prerogative action where presidents have acted on their own initiative and seemingly without the checks and balances traditionally associated with U.S. constitutional powers.

By the end of the course, successful students will have a framework to consider the position of the contemporary President within the American system. They will be able to provide informed opinions on central questions about presidents such as whether presidents have too little power to meet public expectations or too much power to fit within the constitutional system. Beyond simply understanding individual presidents or the institution of the presidency, successful students will know more about the exercise of political power and develop informed opinions about the proper exercise of that power.

Text Books:

Grades:
Your final grade will be based upon 2 in-class exams and a research paper that will be written over the course of the semester. Each will be weighted as follows:

- Mid-term Exam: 30%
- Final Exam: 30%
- Research Paper: 40%
  - Preliminary bibliography: 10%
  - Rough draft: 10%
  - Final Paper: 15%
  - Response Paper: 5%

Grade Scale:

- 93-100: A
- 90-93: A-
- 87-89: B+
- 83-86: B
- 80-83: B-
- 77-79: C+
- 73-76: C
- 70-73: C-
- 67-69: D+
- 63-66: D
- 60-63: D-
- below 60: F

Grades are not based upon a curve, but rather upon reasonable expectations for learning and a standard of the understanding for an upper-division undergraduate American politics that each student should have after completing this course. As of the first day of class, I would happily give everyone in the class an A, provided each person earned one. That said, students should recognize that a C represents an average score that meets basic requirements. To receive an A, students must have achievement that is “outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.” Do not assume that you will get an A unless you are willing to put in the work necessary to reach that standard.

Class policies:
Students are expected to take the exams on the dates listed. If you cannot take an exam on the scheduled date, you must make arrangements with me at least a week in advance. Do not assume that you have made arrangements unless I have responded and agreed in person, by phone or via e-mail. I will not give make-up exams, and will make exceptions only in unusual circumstances, so it is up to you to notify me as soon as you know there may be a conflict.

Other assignments are due on the date scheduled at the beginning of class. Late papers will be penalized one letter grade per day that they are late. Except in unusual circumstances, I will not accept e-mailed assignments. Students are responsible for keeping all returned copies of their assignments in case errors happen, so that they can produce a graded copy of returned assignments.

Unless otherwise noted, all written assignments must be typed and double space in 12-point, Times New Roman font with 1” margins. Any paper that fails to meet this requirement will be graded down. This policy is not meant to be punitive, but rather to ease the task of grading. It becomes difficult to
grade papers of the various fonts, font sizes and margins, and it feels insulting when people try to
deceive me by changing spacing, fonts and margins. If this requirement presents a problem for you or
your computer, talk to me in advance.

I am highly skeptical of using computer problems as an excuse for late assignments, and will not accept
this as a valid excuse. Students should take all reasonable precautions, make multiple backups of any
notes or assignments, and print hard copies of work as a protection against computer malfunction.
Furthermore, in general, e-mail has proven not to be a reliable form of communication, so please be
sure to communicate any important information to me in person rather than sending it via e-mail.

Readings are listed on the syllabus and you are expected to read the material prior to class so that you
can participate in class discussions. Anything in the assigned readings is fair game for the tests,
because I will not cover everything in course lectures.

Attendance is expected. Students are not specifically graded on class attendance, but there will be
information presented in the class that is not available elsewhere and it will be on the exams. I am
willing to discuss and clarify the contents of class discussions and lectures, but not as a substitute for
class attendance. Furthermore, there will be some in-class activities designed to measure students’
understanding, and prepare students for tests. Students who find that they must miss class should
arrange to get notes from another student.

No cheating or plagiarism will be tolerated, and acts of academic misconduct will be punished
according to university rules. If you have any questions regarding cheating or plagiarism, please
discuss them with me or consult university rules. All other university policies also apply to this course.

Questions about Grading:
I do not use surprises on tests to measure students’ knowledge of the course materials. I make the
contents of the tests and the requirements for papers as clear as possible. If students have attended
each class and done the assigned readings, they should do well on the test. If you have any questions
about expectations, please ask as soon as possible.

Because I am clear about the contents of tests, my test questions are straightforward and requirements
for papers are clearly stated, I am confident in the fairness of my exams and assigned grades.

However, if you feel that you have been graded unfairly, I will personally re-grade your test or paper.
To provide the best environment for all students to be treated equally, I have two requirements prior to
reconsidering a grade. First, there is a 24-hour waiting period, so that the student can reconsider their
work rather than react out of anxiety or frustration. Second, students must provide a written
explanation of why their work fully meets the question or requirements. In addition to being unfair to
your peers, asking to change a grade because you simply want a better grade is insufficient reason to
change a grade.

Finally, whenever I re-grade, I reserve the right to raise or lower the grade if I feel it has received an
unwarranted grade. Remember, the most important result of any class at is the knowledge gained from the class and not the grade received. Even if you are disappointed in a grade, it is most important to learn the material and understand the subject of the course for your development as a student, citizen and scholar.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:
I encourage and appreciate the contribution of students with disabilities in my courses. Whenever necessary, I will provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or meet course requirements. I encourage you to take advantage of support from the university. Minnesota State University provides students with disabilities reasonable accommodation to participate in educational programs, activities or services. Students with disabilities requiring accommodation to participate in class activities or meet course requirements should first register with the Office of Disability Services, (Memorial Library 132, telephone 289-2825, TDD 711) to establish an accommodation plan and then contact me as soon as possible.

Week 1 (January 11-15) Introduction
Edwards and Wayne. Presidential Leadership, Ch. 1


Scott James, “The Evolution of the Presidency: Between the Promise and the Fear” in Aberbach and Peterson, Institutions of American Democracy, p.3-40.


Week 2: (January 19-22) Constitutional Framework
Joel D. Aberbach. in Campbell et al., eds., The George W. Bush Legacy, p. 112-134.

Constitution, Articles I, II and III.  
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html

Federalist Papers, Number 10, 51, 68, 69, and 70.  
http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html

Antifederalist Papers  
George Clinton, vol. 6, p. 177.  


**Weeks 3 and 4: (January 25- February 5) Presidents, the Presidency and Power**

Edwards and Wayne, Presidential Leadership, Ch. 8


Christopher H. Foremen, Jr. in Campbell et al., eds., The George W. Bush Legacy, p. 265-287.


**Deadline: (February 8) Preliminary topic paper and bibliography due at the beginning of class.**

**Week 5: (February 8-12) Presidents and the People--Elections**

Edwards and Wayne. Presidential Leadership, Ch. 2 and 3.

James E. Campbell in Campbell et al., eds., The George W. Bush Legacy, p. 21-44.


**Week 6: (February 15-19) Presidents and the People—Public Presidency**

Edwards and Wayne, Presidential Leadership, Ch. 4 and 5


Morris Fiorina in Campbell et al., eds., The George W. Bush Legacy, p. 92-111.


Week 7: (February 22-26) The President and the Presidency
Edwards and Wayne, Presidential Leadership, Ch. 6 and 7

Andrew Rudalevige in Campbell et al., eds., The George W. Bush Legacy, p. 135-163.


Midterm Monday, March 1

Week 8: (March 3-5) The President and the Executive Branch
Edwards and Wayne, Presidential Leadership, Ch 9


Weeks 9 and 10: (March 15-26) Inter-branch Relations: Congress
Edwards and Wayne, Presidential Leadership, Ch. 10 and 13


Woodrow Wilson, Leaders of Men (p.19-21, 39-48); Congressional Government (p. 82-103, 184-89); and Constitutional Government (p.54-7, 68-75, 102-111, 171-2).


Deadline: (March 29) Rough draft of research paper due at the beginning of class. Bring two copies to class.

Week 11: (March 29- April 2) Inter-branch Relations: Judiciary
Edwards and Wayne, Presidential Leadership, Ch. 11

David A. Yalof in Campbell et al., eds., The George W. Bush Legacy, p. 188-212.
**Week 12: (April 5-9) Foreign Policy**
Edwards and Wayne, *Presidential Leadership*, Ch. 14 and 15


**Deadline: (April 5) Response papers due at the beginning of class.**

**Week 13: (April 12-16) Domestic Policy and the Prerogative Presidency**

Edwards and Wayne, *Presidential Leadership*, Ch 12


**Week 14 and 15: (April 19-30) To Be Announced**

Midwest Political Science Association Meeting April 22-25.

**Deadline: (April 30) Final research paper due at the beginning of class.**

**Final Exam: Monday, May 3, 12:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. (BE SURE TO DOUBLECHECK)**

I reserve the right to change this syllabus as needed.