This course introduces many new approaches to understanding the President and the politics of the executive branch, but no matter how many topics we cover or how well the lectures and readings cover issues, there is no substitute for students personally engaging a research topic by writing a research paper. In this course, the research paper represents a large portion of the grade and we will dedicate some class time to working on the papers, even though you will do the bulk of the work outside of class.

To encourage students to select a topic and begin research as soon as possible, and to improve the quality of writing and research, there will be several deadlines for portions of this project. First, students must hand in a 1-2 page statement of their preliminary topic assignment on February 19. This assignment should have a general statement of your proposed topic with a little background information, a statement of your preliminary research question or thesis, and a bibliography of 4-6 academic sources. These sources should be books, book chapters, academic articles or policy papers from reputable researchers, and they should have substantive information about your topic. Furthermore, you should familiarize yourself with the sources (at least the relevant pages or chapters) to assure yourself that they contain relevant information. The research question and sources are not set in stone at this point, and you should plan on adding more sources, and refining your research question and thesis as the paper progresses. Talk to me during my office hours if you have questions, but you should start thinking about this project as soon as possible.

A draft of the paper is due on March 29. While this is technically a “rough” draft, it should not look rough or unedited. The draft should be in a relatively polished form that is near the quality of a finished paper because you will give it to fellow students for editing, comments and responses. It should be in essay form with a clear thesis and paragraphs, and the bibliography should be organized as if it was a final draft. In addition to sharing her or his paper, each student will receive two other students’ papers to read, edit and respond to in like fashion. Your papers will reflect a team effort.

This assignment entails dependence upon your fellow students’ constructive criticism and editing. Each student will read other students’ papers, return the edited copies and a 1-2 page commentary for each author to the authors and turn in a copy of their response papers for a class grade. I expect each student to be constructive, responsible and respectful, but if you feel your peer editor has failed in her or his duties, please bring it to my attention. Not every student has the same writing background or skills, but each can be held to reasonable expectations as an advanced college student.
The final paper along with the graded preliminary topic papers and edited copies from your peer editors’ are due on April 26. Each student should account for suggestions and comments by your peers. You do not need to make every suggested change or address every comment, but you should at least have a good reason why the suggestion was not be addressed. This paper will be graded on its content, thesis strength, thesis clarity, presentation of evidence, research, incorporation of peer comments, and overall quality.

While I will not specifically grading on grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc., they will be reflected in other aspects of the grade. Poor grammar and writing skills reflect poorly upon the whole work. Everyone needs a proofreader and editor. While your peer editors should help you catch most mistakes, if you have chronic difficulties with writing, you should seek help from the university writing centers.

**Paper Format:**
The paper should be between 7-10 typed pages, double spaced in Times New Roman 12-point font. Include separate pages for a title (with course information) and a bibliography, and do not count these pages toward the 7-10 pages. Number your pages at the bottom, staple them in the upper left corner, and do not put them in a binder.

**Research Topic:**
Any topic related to the President, Presidency or executive branch is appropriate, but be sure the scope of your topic is broad enough to be interesting and narrow enough to be covered within time and page limits. You may choose a specific issue or topic raised in one of the classes or readings and offer an expansion of the materials covered in class on some aspect of the week’s topic. You may take an approach similar to this class and treat the President and Presidency as an institution, looking for broader findings about the institution, or you can pursue particular topics of interest to individual administrations. You may also want to focus on one, two or three presidents or events in history, or the many other elements of presidential politics such as the White House staff, the Executive Office of the President or the cabinet departments. If you have questions, please ask me and together we can find an appropriate topic.

**Paper Tone:**
Your aim, as much as possible, should be to offer a main thesis statement backed up by analysis, explanation of your topic and drawing a logical conclusion after consideration of the evidence. You should have a research question and your thesis should address some general conclusion that you have made, but it should be made from the perspective of analysis rather than editorializing or strong advocacy. Your purpose is to inform your readers, and give them evidence for your conclusion or set of conclusions. Regardless of whether you choose a topic that addresses the President or Presidency as an institution, or one that focuses on one (or more) individual in the office, use your paper to draw broader conclusions about executive politics in America. In short, you should offer a thesis but also seriously consider the interests, arguments and points of view of others, and present them as fairly as possible while still offering some overarching thesis.