**The Presidency and Executive Leadership**

**POSC 211B, Fall 2017**

**Persson 108, MW 12:20-1:10pm**

**Instructor: Sam Rosenfeld**

**Office: Persson 120**

**Office hours: Tuesday 9:30-11:30am, Wednesday 4:00-5:00pm, and by appointment**

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The American presidency presents a paradox. Occupants of the office sit in a position of unmatched significance and power, both domestically and in world affairs. At the same time, they face hard and extensive limits on that power, and are plagued by unrealizable public expectations concerning their ability to shape both public policy and national conditions. This course aims to explore this paradox through an examination of the complex, controversial, and ever-changing role the presidency plays in the American political system. It covers the origins and historical development of the office, the democratic and popular power that it engages, and its place within the modern governing apparatus. Throughout, the course emphasizes an approach to analyzing the presidency that is both historical—attending to the complex institutional development of the presidency over time—and comparative—engaging the distinctive dynamics of presidential systems in comparison to those of the parliamentary model more commonly found elsewhere in the democratic world.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

* Understand the developmental dynamics of the office;
* Consider questions of presidential “weakness” and “strength” with analytical rigor;
* Compare the American presidency with other established democracies’ approaches to executive power;
* Connect the nuts-and-bolts dynamics of presidential nominations and elections to broader themes and challenges in American democratic governance;
* Relate the presidency to the party system and to contemporary party polarization;
* Trace the changing place of the president in the governance structure;
* Bring the tools of historically engaged political science to bear on the extraordinary developments of the Trump presidency.

READINGS:

The following required texts are available at the bookstore for rental or purchase. All readings not included in the volumes below will be posted on Moodle.

* Bruce Ackerman, *The Decline and Fall of the American Republic* (2010)
* William G. Howell and Terry M. Moe, *Relic: How Our Constitution Undermines Effective Government, and Why We Need a More Powerful Presidency* (2016)
* Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776-2014* 7th Ed. (2016) **[referred to as M&S below]**
* Michael Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System* 10th Ed. (2014)

In addition to the assigned readings, students are also encouraged to follow contemporary political and policy news by regularly reading newspapers like the [*New York Times*](http://www.nytimes.com/) or [*Washington Post*;](http://www.washingtonpost.com/) politics-focused online magazines such as [*Vox*](http://vox.com), [*FiveThirtyEight*](http://fivethirtyeight.com/politics/), and [*Politico*](http://www.politico.com/); and political science blogs like [Mischiefs of Faction](http://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction), [Polyarchy](https://www.vox.com/polyarchy), and [The Monkey Cage](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/).

PARTICIPATION, ASSIGNMENTS, AND GRADING:

This class will involve in-class discussion as a regular component of the meetings. Completed reading assignments, regular attendance, and active participation are all, thus, mandatory requirements. Active participation involves asking questions, answering questions, offering your opinions, and engaging in small-group work. To discuss the American presidency unavoidably means discussing contentious and controversial subjects—now more than ever. That makes it all the more important for us to model thoughtful citizenship and deliberation by stating our opinions constructively and respectfully and listening carefully when fellow classmates are speaking.

Active reading involves paying attention not only to the questions that a text *answers*, but also the questions that it *provokes*. Those questions, in turn, provide the grist for analytically productive discussions in class. To keep you engaged with the reading and to help inform our in-class discussions, you will be asked to submit one question to me each week, by **Sunday at 10pm**, that concerns either reading from the prior week or reading done for the upcoming week. I ask that you strive to generate a question that meets both of the following criteria: 1.) You genuinely do not know an answer to this question; and 2.) You genuinely *would like* to know an answer to this question. Attendance, participation in discussion, and weekly submission of this discussion question will all count toward your participation grade.

The most effective route to clear and rigorous understanding of a complex institution like the American presidency can be found in the challenge of analytical writing. Thus this course also includes a 7-8 page writing assignment that will be due on **November 15**. This paper will ask you to employ themes from class as well as a limited number of outside sources to make an argument about Donald Trump’s candidacy, election, or tenure so far as president and its relationship to the 21st-century party system. Details on the assignment and specific topics from which you can choose to write about will come later in the semester.

In addition to the paper, weekly question submission, and regular participation in class, students’ grasp of the material will be assessed through a short quiz on presidential history, two in-class midterms, and a final exam.

Course grades are broken down as follows:

* 15% participation
* 5% quiz (9/25)
* 15% midterm 1 (10/2)
* 15% midterm 2 (11/1)
* 25% paper (11/15)
* 25% final exam (12/20)

CLASSROOM POLICIES:

* Students are expected to attend class. Three class absences lacking documented excuses (such as a medical issue, family emergency, or religious observance) will reduce your course grade by 1/3 of a letter. Students are also expected to arrive to class *on time*. Three consecutive instances of tardiness will result in a 1/3-letter-grade reduction in your overall course grade.
* Late submission of the paper assignment will result in a 1/3-letter-grade reduction in that paper’s grade for every 24 hours it is late.
* Cell phones, tablets, and laptops are prohibited in class. We will be making this a laptop-free class not merely because the internet presents temptations for distraction, but also because [research has indicated](http://www.vox.com/2014/6/4/5776804/note-taking-by-hand-versus-laptop) that we absorb and retain information more effectively when taking notes by hand instead of by computer. If this policy presents a hardship for you, please discuss it with me during my office hours or by appointment and we will work out an accommodation.
* I expect you to abide by the [Colgate Academic Honor Code](https://www.colgate.edu/student-handbook2/academic-dishonesty-and-the-academic-honor-code#code). Violations will be reported to the Honor Court.
* If you feel you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, meet with me to discuss your specific needs. Please also contact Lynn Waldman, Director of Academic Support and Disability Services (315-228-7375, [lwaldman@colgate.edu)](mailto:lwaldman@colgate.edu)), who reviews documentation to determine and help coordinate reasonable and appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities.

CALENDAR:

8/29 Half-day course overview

8/30 Detailed course introduction and discussion of key themes and goals

9/1 Studying the Presidency When Donald Trump is President

* Julia Azari, “Trump Came In as a Weak President, and He’s Made Himself Weaker,” *FiveThirtyEight*, August 1, 2017
* Seth Masket, “The Dangers of a Weakened President,” *Pacific Standard*, August 21, 2017
* Kevin Hopkins, “Success Has Eluded Trump, But He Could Win a Republican Civil War,” Honest Graft blog, August 23, 2017

PART I: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

9/4 The American Presidency in Comparative Perspective

* Arend Lijphart, Introduction, *Parliamentary Versus Presidential Systems* (1992)
* Nelson Polsby, “The Presidential Campaign, British-Style,” in *New Federalist Papers* (1997)

9/6 Constitutional Origins I

* M&N Chs 1 and 2

9/8 Constitutional Origins II

* James Madison, *Federalist* Paper 47
* Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist* Paper 70

9/11 Thinking About the Presidency Developmentally

* Scott James, “Historical Institutionalism, Political Development, and the Presidency,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency* (2009)

9/13 The Rise of Parties and the Transformation of the Presidency I

* M&N Chs 3-4

9/15 The Rise of Parties and the Transformation of the Presidency II

* E.E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (1942), Ch 1
* Nelson Ch 1: Jeffrey K. Tulis, “The Two Constitutional Presidencies”

9/18 The Age of Jackson

* M&N Ch 5
* Steve Inskeep, “Donald Trump and the Legacy of Andrew Jackson,” *The Atlantic*, November 30, 2016

9/20 The Presidency in the Party Period

* M&N Chs 6-7
* Julia Azari, “Trump is a 19th Century President Facing 21st Century Problems,” *FiveThirtyEight*, August 28, 2017

9/22 Progressive Transformations

* M&N Ch 8

9/25 Quiz on the 45 presidents, then: What is the Modern Presidency?

* M&N Ch10
* David K. Nichols, *The Myth of the Modern Presidency* (1994), Ch 1

9/27 Is Presidential Power Cyclical?

* Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make* (1993), Ch 3
* Julia Azari, “Trump’s Presidency Signals the End of the Reagan Era,” Mischiefs of Faction blog, December 1, 2016
* Scott Lemieux, “Is Donald Trump the Next Jimmy Carter?,” *The New Republic*, January 23, 2017

9/29 Midterm review session

10/2 Midterm 1

PART II: THE DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENCY

10/4 Presidential Nominations I

* Nelson Ch 7: Lara M. Brown, “The Presidency and the Nominating Process: Aspirants, Parties, and Elections”
* Cohen et al, “Party Versus Faction in the Reformed Presidential Nominating System,” *PS* (October 2016)

10/6 Presidential Nominations II

* Seth Masket, “How to Improve the Primary Process? Make It Less Democratic,” *Pacific Standard*, August 11, 2017

10/9 FALL BREAK, NO CLASS

10/11 Our Weird Electoral College

* Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* 2nd Ed. (2003), Ch 4
* Nelson Ch 8: George C. Edwards III, “The Faulty Premises of the Electoral College”
* Harry Enten, “It’s Not All About Clinton—The Midwest Was Getting Redder Before 2016,” *FiveThirtyEight*, December 9, 2016

10/13 Do Presidential Campaigns Matter?

* Gary Jacobson, “The Triumph of Polarized Partisanship in 2016: Donald Trump’s Improbable Victory,” *Political Science Quarterly* (2017)
* Nate Silver, “Clinton’s Ground Game Didn’t Cost Her the Election,” *FiveThirtyEight*, February 13, 2017

10/16 Presidents in a Polarizing Party System I

* M&N Ch 11
* Nelson Ch 12: Sidney Milkis, “The Presidency and Political Parties”

10/18 Presidents in a Polarizing Party System II

* Alan Abramowitz and Steven Webster, “The rise of negative partisanship and the nationalization of U.S. elections in the 21st century,” *Electoral Studies* (2016)
* Brandon Rottinghaus, “Going Partisan,” Brookings Institution, October 2013

10/20 Trump: Partisan or Party Crasher?

* Lee Drutman, “Trump’s candidacy is going to realign the political parties,” Polyarchy blog, March 1, 2016
* Philip Rucker, Sean Sullivan, Mike DeBonis, “Trump distances himself from GOP lawmakers to avoid blame if agenda stalls,” *Washington Post*, August 24, 2017

10/23 Great Communicators?

* Nelson Ch 9: Bruce Miroff, “The Presidential Spectacle”
* Nelson Ch 10: Elvin T. Lim, “The Presidency and the Media: Two Faces of Democracy”

10/25 Great Persuaders?

* Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (1960), Ch 3
* Jonathan Bernstein, “The 1960 Book that Explains Why Trump is a Failure,” *Bloomberg News*, August 16, 2017
* Ezra Klein, “The Unpersuaded,” *New Yorker*, March 19, 2012

10/27 Inevitable catch up

10/30 Midterm review

11/1 Midterm II

PART III: THE PRESIDENCY IN THE GOVERNMENT

11/3 The West Wing

* Nelson Ch 13: John P. Burke, “The Institutional Presidency”
* Maggie Haberman, “John Kelly’s Latest Mission: Controlling the Information Flow to Trump,” *New York Times*, August 24, 2017

11/6 Master of the Executive Branch?

* Nelson Ch 14: David E. Lewis and Terry Moe, “The Presidency and the Bureaucracy: The Levers of Presidential Control”
* “‘Am I an Accomplice to this Terrible Thing That’s Happening?’,” *New York Magazine*, August 22, 2017

11/8 The Politics of Judicial Nominations

* Nelson Ch 16: David A. Yalof, “The Presidency and the Judiciary”

11/10 PROFESSOR AT CONFERENCE, CLASS CANCELLED

11/13 The Legislative President

* Nelson Ch 15: Matthew J. Dickinson, “The President and Congress”

11/15 The Changing Politics of Divided Government

* M&N Chs 12-13

-- WEDNESDAY, 11/15, 11:59 PM: PAPER DUE --

11/17 The Inherent Politics of Impeachment

* Evan Osnos, “How the President Could Get Fired,” *The New Yorker*, May 8, 2017

--THANKSGIVING BREAK--

11/27 Stronger Presidency, Better Governance? I

* Moe and Howell, Introduction and Chs 1-2

11/29 Stronger Presidency, Better Governance? II

* Nelson Ch 17: Andrew Rudalevige, “The Presidency and Unilateral Power: A Taxonomy”
* Moe and Howell, Ch 3

12/1 Stronger Presidency, Better Governance? III

* Andrew Prokop, “How Barack Obama is expanding presidential power—and what it means for the future,” *Vox*, September 9, 2014
* Ben Casselman et al, “Trump Isn’t a Do-Nothing President,” *FiveThirtyEight*, April 21, 2017

12/4 National Security and Presidential Power

* Nelson Ch 19: Andrew Polsky, “The Presidency at War: The Window of Agency in Wartime Presidential Leadership”
* Ackerman, Introduction and Ch 2

12/6 Systemic Risks in Presidential Power

* Ackerman Chs 1, 3

12/8 The Ratchet of Presidential Power

* Ackerman Ch 4
* M&N Ch 14
* Garrett Epps, “Obama Leaves the Constitution Weaker than He Found It,” *The Atlantic*, January 3, 2017

12/11 Two Directions for Institutional Reform

* Howell and Moe Ch 4
* Ackerman, Ch 6 and conclusion

12/13 Reassessing Presidential Democracy

* Juan Linz, “The Perils of Presidentialism,” *Journal of Democracy* (1990)
* Dylan Matthews interview with Juan Linz, *Washington Post*, January 22, 2013

12/20 12:00-2:00pm: Final Exam