

**POSC 100: Presidential Politics**  
Tuesday/Thursday 9:30am-10:50am  
CHASS Interdisciplinary-North, Room 1002  
Fall 2023

Instructor: David Miller

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Office location: Watkins Hall Room 2209

Office hours: Tuesday 11:00AM-12:30 PM (in-person), 7:00PM-8:00PM (virtual) ([reserve via Calendly](#))

### ***Course Description***

The American president is often thought of as the most powerful single individual in the United States and in the world—but, with that great power comes great responsibility. In this course, we will unpack what it means to be president, at once powerful but often powerless to solve the country and the world's problems alone and to satisfy the expectations of the public. We will begin by reviewing the historical origins of the modern presidency. Then, we will examine the key powers the president wields to advance their electoral, policy, and legacy goals, and how other actors can facilitate or inhibit their success. Finally, we will consider the extent to which presidents can be held to account and to be responsible to the preferences of the polity in the execution of their duties. This class will emphasize an institutional approach to the presidency—that is, focusing on the role of president and how that role conditions individuals' behavior rather than the idiosyncrasies of particular presidents—and draw on social scientific skills to contemplate how and why presidents behave as they do. The class will culminate with students working in small “task forces” to produce briefing papers that will inform future occupants of the Oval Office about the powers at their disposal and how best to employ them.

### ***Course Goals***

Students who complete this course successfully will be able to:

- Acknowledge how the Founding and earlier periods of American history molded the modern institution of the presidency
- Understand the powers presidents wield and how and why presidents utilize them
- Appreciate how external actors (e.g., Congress, the courts, the public) inform and constrain presidents' behavior
- Analyze, critique, and synthesize peer-reviewed academic articles about the American presidency
- Work with peers to produce a briefing paper that advises future officeholders on one of the powers of the presidency

### ***Required Texts, Materials, or Equipment***

There is one required textbook for this class:

Howell, William G. 2023. *The American Presidency: An Institutional Approach to Executive Politics*. Princeton University Press.

The primary purpose of this textbook is to serve as a “primer” on each class period’s given topic, with the expectation that students will come to class familiar with the assigned chapter(s) and be prepared to be exposed to additional, more advanced content and/or engage in in-depth discussion.

In addition to this textbook, students will be expected to complete other assigned readings (e.g., journal articles). Most of these articles are hyperlinked to the UCR Library below and can be accessed for free (UCR login required). Other articles to which UCR does not have access will be posted to the course Canvas page.

### ***Assignments and Grading***

Course grades will be determined by students’ performance on the following assignments and tasks:

- Briefing paper (50%): As a capstone to the class, students are asked to prepare a briefing paper about one of the powers of the presidency. This briefing paper will be completed in small groups (otherwise referred to as “task forces”) and will be completed in several intermediate chunks. More details about the research design will be distributed in class. Major deadlines related to the assignment are noted in the schedule at the end of the syllabus.
- Article outlines (20%): Four times during the semester, students must prepare and submit an outline of one of the research articles assigned for that week’s meetings. In preparing their outlines, students will be asked to: identify the research question; describe the theory the author develops to offer an answer to that question; state the authors’ hypotheses; describe the data and methods the author uses to test their hypotheses; report the authors’ results; and briefly comment on the internal and external validity of the study. More details on the format and expectations for these article summaries will be provided in class.
  - **NOTE 1: All students must complete two of their four outlines by October 31, and must have their remaining outlines completed by the end of the quarter.**
  - **NOTE 2: Outlines are due before class on Tuesday on the week when the articles outlined will be discussed.**

- **NOTE 3: Articles eligible for outlines are denoted in the reading list with a double asterisk (\*\*)**
- “What the heck are you up to, Mr. President?”<sup>1</sup> (10%): Once during the semester, each task force will be asked to give a short 5-10 minute presentation about what President Joe Biden has been up to since the last class period. In doing so, task forces can discuss events the president has attended, policy or staffing decisions that have emanated from the White House, public remarks the president or his immediate staff and appointees have made, or anything else related to the actions of the president. Students may prepare a short slide presentation, show the class web content, or use any other appropriate visuals. I will give a sample presentation during the first week of the semester that can serve as a template for future weeks.
- Class participation (20%): While this is a medium-sized class that is not conducive to traditional seminar discussion, I have designed it in such a way as to depend heavily on participation from students through both attendance and verbal contributions. This means that all students are expected to come to class prepared to ask and answer questions both as individuals and as part of their task forces. At each class period, I will ask task forces to report their attendance; while there is no maximum number of absences allowed during the quarter, students who miss several classes without authorization from the instructor will have difficulty receiving high participation grades. Additionally, I will sometimes “cold-call” task forces to respond to discussion questions in class, so task forces should use time allotted to prepare for those questions wisely.
  - **NOTE 1: YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE SIMULATION ACTIVITY TOWARDS THE END OF THE QUARTER WILL CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR PARTICIPATION GRADE.**
  - **NOTE 2: THERE IS NO FORMAL ATTENDANCE POLICY FOR THIS CLASS, BUT I WILL ASK TASK FORCES TO REPORT MEMBERS’ ATTENDANCE AT EVERY CLASS AND USE THIS INFORMATION TO APPROPRIATELY ALLOCATE PARTICIPATION POINTS (I.E., A MEMBER WHO IS NOT PRESENT WILL NOT BE CREDITED FOR THE TASK FORCES’ PARTICIPATION IN A GIVEN CLASS PERIOD)**
- Extra credit (?): I reserve the right to provide opportunities for extra credit throughout the quarter. Extra credit opportunities may consist of finding current events examples of class concepts, offering responses to supplemental readings, and attending civic engagement events on campus or remotely. The value of each extra credit opportunity towards students’ final grades will be provided in writing when each opportunity is

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase originated as a headline used by The New York Post on July 5, 1979, in reference to President Jimmy Carter. At the time, the United States was experiencing serious economic and social turbulence and the president had cancelled a planned national address and sequestered himself at Camp David for a period of soul-searching. On July 15, Carter reemerged to deliver his [“crisis of confidence” speech](#) (also known as the “malaise speech”) to the nation. While initially well-received, subsequent actions by Carter, such as asking for the resignations of all of his Cabinet members, created the perception of an administration in disarray.

announced (or shortly thereafter).

Final grades will be assigned according to the following cutoffs:

Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade
≥ 94	A	≥ 83	B	≥ 73	C	≥ 60	D
≥ 90	A-	≥ 80	B-	≥ 70	C-	< 60	F
≥ 87	B+	≥ 77	C+	≥ 65	D+		

### *Course Policies*

- A link to the current version of the course syllabus will be posted on the course's Canvas page. Please refer to the most current version of the syllabus for information about the course schedule, course policies, etc.
- All other course readings will be made available through either the course syllabus, the UCR Library, and/or the course Canvas page at least one week in advance of the class for which they are expected to be completed.
- We will often refer to contemporary political events both in lectures and class activities. In order to participate fully, I strongly encourage you to spend at least 10 minutes each day familiarizing yourself with recent news about American politics. You may consult the news source(s) of your choice; recommended sources (in no particular order) include The New York Times, the Washington Post, CNN, NPR, CBS, NBC, ABC, and the BBC.
- All readings and assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day specified on the course syllabus and/or by the instructor in class. Late assignments will be accepted, but will be assessed a 10% penalty for each 24 hour period the assignment is late.
- *Communication Outside of Class*
  - I encourage you to contact me to discuss topics we are covering in class, concerns about the course, or other related issues outside of class. The primary mode of communication outside of class will be email. When you email me, please include the course code in the subject line. I will do my best to reply to emails within 24 hours, and I will *not* respond to emails about assignments or exams sent less than 24 hours before they are due.
  - Office hours scheduling will take place via Calendly. If you would like to come to office hours, please visit my Calendly schedule and reserve an available time for us to meet. Drop-in visits are permitted during in-person office hours (if the slot is not already booked), but virtual office hours must be reserved at least 6 hours in advance. If there are no available appointments or if you are not able to

see me during office hours, please contact me so that we can find an alternative time to meet.

- *Technology*
  - Phone/laptop computer/tablet use is permitted only for the purposes of taking notes and retrieving materials/resources relevant to the course. Please be mindful that when you use your devices
  - If any students would like to record lectures, please speak with me in advance to obtain permission.
- *Academic Integrity:* Here at UCR we are committed to upholding and promoting the values of the Tartan Soul: Integrity, Accountability, Excellence, and Respect. As a student in this class, it is your responsibility to act in accordance with these values by completing all assignments in the manner described, and by informing the instructor of suspected acts of academic misconduct by your peers. By so doing, you will not only affirm your own integrity, but also the integrity of the intellectual work of this University, and the degree which it represents. Should you choose to commit academic misconduct in this class, you will be held accountable according to the policies set forth by the University, and will incur appropriate consequences both in this class and from Student Conduct and Academic Integrity Programs. For more information regarding University policy and its enforcement, please visit: [conduct.ucr.edu](http://conduct.ucr.edu).
- *Generative AI:* Generative AI (such as Google Bard or ChatGPT) can be a potentially useful and powerful information source and thought partner which can enhance productivity and learning. However, over-reliance or dependence on generative AI can undermine your education, limit opportunities for intellectual growth, and impact your performance in venues like job interviews, meetings, and presentations. Therefore, this course has been designed to emphasize authentic learning and utilizes assessment methods that reduce the potential usefulness of generative AI in your work. Furthermore, all work submitted in this course must be your own. Although generative AI may be used like any other source of information that supports your work – such as a book, article, video, interview, etc. – it must be properly quoted and cited each time it is used. Failure to properly cite the use of AI in your work will be viewed as a potential academic integrity violation.

### ***Disclaimer***

I reserve the right to make modifications to this information throughout the semester. In the event of a conflict between syllabus versions, the most recent version will always supersede previous versions.

## *Preliminary Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments*<sup>2</sup>

### **September 28—Introductory Session**

- Howell Chapter 0
- [Optional Reading: \*Quantitative Research Methods for Political Science, Public Policy and Public Administration: 4th Edition with Applications in R\* by Hank Jenkins-Smith, Joseph Ripberger, Gary Copeland, Matthew Nowlin, Tyler Hughes, Aaron Fister, and Wesley Wehde, Chapters 1 and 2](#)

### **October 3—Reading, Writing, and Researching**

- [Oxley, Zoe M, Mirya R Holman, Jill S Greenlee, Angela L Bos, and J Celeste Lay. 2020. “Children’s Views of the American Presidency.” \*Public Opinion Quarterly\*, 84\(1\): 141–57.](#)

### **October 5—Social Science Practicum**

- No assigned reading

### **October 10—Constitutional Origins of the Presidency (ASYNCHONOUS)**

- Howell Chapter 1
- [Howell, William and Terry M. Moe. “Why the President Needs More Power,” \*Boston Review of Books\*, July 2, 2018.](#)
- **Short writing exercise on Howell and Moe due October 12 at 9:30AM PT on Canvas**

### **October 12, 17—The Modern Institutional Presidency/ Power and the Institutional Presidency**

- Howell Chapter 3, 4 (skim 3, read 4)
- [\\*\\*Clifford, Scott, D.J. Flynn, Brendan Nyhan, and Kasey Rhee. n.d. “Decider in Chief? Why and How the Public Exaggerates the Power of the Presidency.”](#)
- [\\*\\*Beckmann, Matthew N. and Marek M. Kaminski. 2023. “Speaking, Thinking, and Being President.” \*Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy\*, 4\(2\): 159-182.](#)

### **October 19—Relations with Congress**

- Howell Chapter 8
- [\\*\\*Beckmann, Matthew N. 2008. “The President’s Playbook: White House Strategies for Lobbying Congress.” \*Journal of Politics\*, 70\(2\): 407-419.](#)
- [\\*\\*Guenther, Scott M. and Samuel Kernell. 2021. “Veto Threat Bargaining with a Bicameral Congress.” \*Political Research Quarterly\*, 74\(3\):628-644.](#)

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<sup>2</sup> All readings should be completed before the first class of the unit. All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified.

**October 24—Veto Bargaining: A Gentle Introduction to Game Theory  
(ASYNCHRONOUS)**

- No assigned reading
- Veto bargaining “problem set” due October 26 at 9:30AM PT on Canvas

**October 26—Relations with Congress**

- Howell Chapter 8
- \*\*[Beckmann, Matthew N. 2008. “The President’s Playbook: White House Strategies for Lobbying Congress.” \*Journal of Politics\*, 70\(2\): 407-419.](#)
- \*\*[Guenther, Scott M. and Samuel Kernell. 2021. “Veto Threat Bargaining with a Bicameral Congress.” \*Political Research Quarterly\*, 74\(3\):628-644.](#)

**October 31, November 2—Unilateral Powers**

- Howell Chapter 9
- \*\*[Kaufman, Aaron R. and Jon C. Rogowski. 2023. “Divided Government, Strategic Substitution, and Presidential Unilateralism.” \*American Journal of Political Science\*.](#)
- \*\*[Reeves, Andrew R, and Jon C. Rogowski. 2016. “Unilateral Powers, Public Opinion, and the Presidency.” \*Journal of Politics\*, 78\(1\): 137-151.](#)

**November 7, 9—Control of the Bureaucracy**

- Howell Chapter 10
- \*\*[Bednar, Nicholas R. and David E. Lewis. 2023. “Presidential Investment in the Administrative State.” \*American Political Science Review\*.](#)
- \*\*[Moore, Emily H. 2018. “Polarization, Excepted Appointments, and the Administrative Presidency.” \*Presidential Studies Quarterly\*, 48\(1\): 72-92.](#)

**November 14, 16—Relations with the Federal Judiciary**

- Howell Chapter 11
- \*\*[Badas, Alex and Katelyn E. Stauffer. 2023. “Descriptive Representation, Judicial Nominations, and Perceptions of Presidential Accomplishment.” \*Representation\*, 59\(2\): 249-270.](#)
- \*\*[Thrower, Sharece. 2017. “The President, the Court, and Policy Implementation.” \*Presidential Studies Quarterly\*, 47\(1\): 122-145.](#)

**November 21 (REMOTE) — SIMULATION DAY 1**

**November 23 (NO CLASS)**

**November 28—SIMULATION DAY 2**

**November 30—SIMULATION DAY 3**

**December 5, 7—Relations with the Media/Public Opinion**

- Howell Chapter 12, 13 (read 12, skim 13)
- [\\*\\*Franco, Annie, Justin Grimmer, and Chloe Lim. n.d. “The Limited Effect of Presidential Public Appeals.”](#)
- [\\*\\*Christenson, Dino P., Sarah E. Kreps, and Douglas L. Kriner. “Going Public in an Era of Social Media: Tweets, Corrections, and Public Opinion.” \*Presidential Studies Quarterly\*, 51\(1\): 151-165.](#)

**December 9 (FINAL EXAM SLOT, 8:00AM-11:00AM)**

- Final papers due by 11:59PM PT