Political Science 309

The American Presidency

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Political Science 309 focuses our attention on the study of presidential behavior and the politics of the Executive branch. The topic of presidential elections will not be our focus; this is covered in POSC 122 and 202.

**TOPIC:** The study of presidential behavior is widely considered to be one of the weakest fields in American politics. Thanks to historians, we know quite a bit about individual presidents and we know as much as there is to know about the institution of the Presidency as a constitutional creation with great but limited authority. But we know only a modest amount about presidential performance, why they choose certain paths, why they succeed and why they fail. The field is plagued by the problem of small-N (i.e., very few cases across which to compare variables making it very hard to statistically hold constant variables and isolate causes). A pattern of causality that explains behavior, performance, success, etc. may exist for three or four presidents but it may not hold true for an equal or greater number. The field is in the early stages of theory building and we shall contribute to this process in this course. Critical, bold, outside-the-box thinking is especially encouraged because of this dearth of knowledge.

**READINGS:** By the close of the second week of class you will choose any president since Franklin Roosevelt. You will read throughout the term on this president. The amount of required reading in this course is moderate because I expect you to be doing considerable outside reading.


**GRADING:** Your grade will be based on a final exam (25%), the research paper (20% for first draft; 50% total), and classroom participation (25%).

**RESEARCH PAPER:** This is a 300 level seminar course that satisfies one of the research preparation requirements of the Department of Political Science. Research expectations are substantial and students should meet with me periodically to insure that these expectations are clear. The page minimum will be 25 and limit is 40 pages.

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

1/6: E/W 1 and appendix A and N 1

1/11: E/W 4, N 8, N 11.

For each of these Nelson chapters, try to do the following exercise (and turn them in):

**Thinking and talking like a serious researcher**

The theory being tested is .

The question(s) that the author is asking is .

The methodology the author is using is . This methodology will enable the author to operationalize the theory in the following way (discuss independent variable, dependent variable and indicators of...
evidence):

The author's cases are ...

The rationale for case selection is ...

1/13: Suburbs Packet (reserve=RR)

1/18: E/W 6, N 19; Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents, ch. 13, RR.

1/20: "Shadowboxing with Stereotypes," RR and "Hillary Clinton as Rorschach Test," RR and a student paper TBA.

1/25: E/W 7 and 9, N 6

1/27: N 15, 16

2/1: N 5, and "The Great Preemptor" RR.

2/3: Discuss Presidential elections

2/8: E/W 8, N 7

2/10: E/W 5, N 12

2/15: First draft due in class with n extra copies for colleagues.

2/17: N 13, 14

2/22: E/W 10, N 17

2/24: E/W 11, N 18

2/29: E/W 12, 13, 14

3/2: N 20 and TBA

3/7: TBA

3/9: Final Examination due.