Amongst American political institutions, the office of the presidency is perhaps the most visible and widely commented upon. Yet, ironically, the study of the presidency by political scientists lags far behind other areas of American Politics research (e.g., voting and legislative behavior). While the prominence of the presidency as a topic of commentary lies in its ability to be personalized (we sometimes simplistically think of the presidency as merely the president), this individuation has inhibited the development of theoretically and empirically generalizable conclusions about this important political institution. Research on presidential style, personality, greatness, and other aspects of the personal presidency is wonderful fodder for coffee table conversations, but, by and large, it has provided us with little beyond descriptive and atheoretical knowledge.

The presidency remains quite different from the president – the president is the political actor constrained and aided by the presidency. Or, in the language of “new institutionalism” theory, individual preferences are constrained by political institutions – “the formal and informal rules of the game” – in order to produce political output. American presidents have never been autonomous actors within our political system, nor are they automata mechanistically responding to a predetermined sequence of operations. Instead, the individual, his (or her) interests and incentives, must work within the order provided by constitutions and norms, authority and responsibility, and hierarchy and democracy. In this view, the terms of the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 are of far greater theoretical value for understanding of the modern presidency than an examination of President Clinton’s proclivity for peccadillos ever could be.

This seminar explores contemporary, theoretical, and empirical research on the American presidency. The reading assignments in this class serve a dual purpose. One purpose is to establish the foundation of contemporary study of the American presidency. Secondly, they help train Ph.D. students in the major research questions which are now generating publications and discussion among presidential scholars and institutional theorists more broadly within the political science community.

REQUIREMENTS:

The main requirements for this course are simple – READ, THINK, and DISCUSS! You are expected to read all of the assigned books and articles listed on this syllabus, and do it before the class for which it is assigned. Your full participation in the seminar (even if you are auditing) is fundamental to its success. Silence in seminar will not be tolerated.

EVALUATION:

Students will be provided with an option of taking this seminar either as a “proseminar” or as a “research seminar.” This option is essentially a choice between a take-home final exam or a research paper. Each option is worth 30% of your final course grade. Students are required to inform me of the choice by the second class meeting, so that the Director of Graduate Studies can be notified of your status in the course. Ph.D. students in Political Science are highly encouraged to choose the research
Your seminar evaluation will be based upon a final exam or research paper, a series of five-page papers, and your class participation. Those choosing the proseminar option will be required to complete a take-home final examination, which will take the form of a preliminary examination. The research seminar option requires the completion of a research paper, which is due the final day of class (No Incompletes!). The research paper should be a 20-30 page work of original research on the presidency. It should conform to the APSA Style Manual and should be potentially publishable quality. The exact topic and methodological approach of the paper is your choice, but it would be wise to make these decisions in consultation with me. If you choose this option, a two to three-page proposal is due in class during Week 7. Each student also will prepare five critical papers (50%) during the course of the semester. These papers should be no more than five pages long (they can be, and most often will be, shorter!), and should be mailed to seminar participants (this, obviously, includes me) no later than noon on the Sunday before class. The papers should critique the substances of the assigned readings for the week, giving suggestions for alternative perspectives or explanations, or identifying links to alternative literature. Again, these papers should be critical and analytical, not simply synthetic. Finally, your seminar participation accounts for the remaining 30% of your grade.

**TEXTS:** The following texts have been ordered through the Russell House Textbook Store and are required for this course:


Week 1: **Researching the Presidency**


Week 2: **The Presidency and American Political Development**


Week 3: **Presidential Elections**


**Week 4: Presidential Approval**


**Recommended**

Press of America.


**Week 5:** **Follow the Leader?: Presidential Response to Public Opinion**


**Recommended:**


**Week 6:** **Going Public**


**Week 7:** **Congress and the Presidency: Separation of Powers and Divided Government**


**Recommended:**


**Week 8: Congress and the Presidency: Presidential Influence**


**Recommended:**


**Week 9: Congress and the Presidency: Presidential Authority – Veto Power**


**Recommended:**


**Week 10: The President and Public Policy**


Recommended:


Week 11: The Chief Executive: Managing the Bureaucracy


Week 12: The Chief Executive: The Presidency as Institution


Recommended:


**Week 13: Presidential v. Parliamentary System**


