

# PSC 222: The U.S. Presidency

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to a few of the most important features of the U.S. Presidency, and to some of the prominent theoretical perspectives on these features. The goal is to help students build a better-than-average knowledge of the historical context, importance, and implications of events in presidential politics often covered in the news media, and to build students' capacities to share this knowledge with others. The course consists of three parts. We first study presidential elections—both the general election and contests for the major-party nominations. We then examine three of the tools Presidents have available to influence policy—the veto, executive orders and other “unilateral” proclamations, and appointments to executive branch positions. Finally, we study how modern Presidents interact with the media, and how these interactions mediate the relationship between the President and members of the public.

## LOGISTICS

**Meeting Time and Place:** Monday and Wednesday, 12:30 – 1:45 in Goergen 108.

**Required Books:** There are no required books. Instead, copies of each reading will be posted e-reserves at least 1 weeks before the meeting to which it corresponds.

**Course Website:** All relevant information for the course is posted on Blackboard, including this syllabus, links to the readings on e-reserves, and assignment guidelines and due-dates. You can access blackboard at

<http://my.rochester.edu>

Once at this website, click on the “courses” tab. If you are enrolled in the course, you will see an option on that tab to access the course webpage.

**Office Hours:** My office is 320 Harkness Hall. I hold office hours on Wednesdays from 2:30 to 4:00, and by appointment.

## ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

There are four major components to your grade:

- **Class Participation**
- **Debate Project**
- **Mid-term Exams**
- **Final Paper**

**Class Participation:** I teach this class as a reading-intensive seminar. My goal during the class meetings is not to teach students what is in the reading. Instead, it is to facilitate a discussion designed to help you to digest and understand what you have already read. Therefore, I require you to (1) attend all class meetings, (2) do the readings corresponding to each meeting before the meeting itself, (3) come to each class meeting ready to participate in discussion. For each reading, a list of **content questions** will be posted on the course website at least one week prior to the meeting that corresponds to that reading. You are expected to come to lecture with answers ready to give to these questions. I cold-call students at random to answer these questions during each class meeting. I do not expect that your answers to these questions will be correct. I do expect that your answers will reflect substantial effort on your part to understand the reading. There is a lot of reading in this course (an average of 56 pages per week), and most of it is difficult. If you don't like lots of reading, or you have a strong prefer reading textbooks to reading original research, this may not be the right course for you. Class participation does not constitute a set portion of your final grade. Instead, I reserve the right to either raise or lower your final mark by as much as one letter grade based on your participation at each session. In general, I will only adjust a grade on this basis for performance that is remarkably out-of-line with the above expectations.

**Debate Project:** During the second week of the semester, you will be randomly assigned to a study group consisting of 4 to 5 students. Each group will be responsible for making one oral presentation to the rest of the class during the last three weeks of the semester. Specifically, the last three weeks of the semester will be devoted to "recent topics" in presidential politics. During each of these weeks, two of the class study groups will be assigned to make an oral presentation to the class either "for" or "against" a proposition regarding that week's topics. Groups will be assigned to topics and presentation dates randomly. I will circulate detailed requirements for these presentations later in the semester. Each group's performance in its presentation will count for 10% of each group member's final grade.

**Mid-term Exams:** There are 3 mid-term exams during the first two-thirds of the semester. Each mid-term is a take-home exam that you have about one week to complete. Each exam asks you to write one or two short (less than 2 pages) responses to questions regarding the readings. You are allowed to discuss the questions and your answers with the members of the study group to which you are assigned for the debate project. You may not discuss the mid-terms before they are due with anyone other than the members of your study

group. Although you are allowed to talk to the members of your group about the mid-term assignments, your submitted written answers must be your own. I will not read text that is copied verbatim from exams submitted by other members of your study group. The due date for each mid-term is printed in the schedule below. I will not accept late submissions. Each of the three mid-terms counts for 20% of your final grade.

**Final Paper:** There is no final exam. Instead, each student must turn in a final paper by the day on which the final exam for the course is scheduled (this date is set by the registrar mid-way through the semester). This paper should be a written version—in the form of an essay—of the argument your study group made to the class as part of the Debate Project. As with the mid-term exams, you may discuss the assignment with the members of your study group, but the written work you turn in must be your own. This paper must be short—no more than 5 double spaced pages with 1-inch margins, type-written in at least 12 pt font. Papers over the 5 page mark will not be accepted. The final paper counts for 30% of your final grade.

(See next page for the schedule of meetings and readings.)

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND READINGS

**Part I: Presidential Campaigns and Elections**

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PRE-CAMPAIGN PREDICTABILITY AND THE THEORY OF  
ACTIVATION

**Monday 9/10 and  
Wednesday 9/12**

Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1955) *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign, 2nd Edition*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Introduction (pp 1 through 9)
  - Chapters 5 through 11 (pp 40 through 104)
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DOES PREDICABILITY MEAN THAT CAMPAIGNS DON'T MATTER?

Campbell (2000) *The American Election Campaign: U.S. Presidential Campaigns and the National Vote*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

**Monday 9/17 and  
Wednesday 9/19**

- pp. 3 through top of page 22

Gellman and King (1993) "Why Are American Presidential Election Campaign Polls so Variable When Votes Are so Predictable?" *British Journal of Political Science* 23(4): 409–451.

- Read entire article.
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## Campaigns and Elections Continued

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### THE NOMINATION CONTESTS: RULES OF THE GAME AND RECENT REFORMS

**Monday 9/24 and  
Wednesday 9/26**

Hagen and Mayer (2000) “The Modern Politics of Presidential Selection: How Changing the Rules Really Did Change the Game.” In Mayer (Ed.) *In Pursuit of the White House 2000: How We Choose Our Presidential Nominees*. New York: Chatham House Publishers

- Read entire article

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**Exam 1 Distributed in Class on Wednesday 10/3!!! Due at the beginning of class on Wednesday 10/17!!!**

### DID REFORMS “DEMOCRATIZE” NOMINATIONS?

**Monday 10/1 and  
Wednesday 10/3**

Cohen, Karol, Noel, and Zaller (2001) *Beating Reform: The Resurgence of Parties in Presidential Nominations, 1980 to 2000*. Unpublished Manuscript.

- Read pp 1 through 78.
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## Part II: The Nature of Presidents' Influence on Policy

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Monday 10/8 and  
Wednesday 10/10

No Class: Fall Break

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Exam 1 due at the beginning of class on Wednesday  
10/17!!!

Monday 10/15,  
Wednesday  
10/17, and  
Monday 10/22

THE PRESIDENTIAL VETO

Krehbiel (1998) *Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking*.  
Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 20 through 75)
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PRESIDENTIAL UNILATERAL ACTION

Wednesday 10/24  
and Monday  
10/29

Howell (2003) *Power Without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct  
Presidential Action*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Read pp. 1 through 8 and pp. 14 through 23 closely
  - Read pp. 24 through 37 to get a basic idea of the model (if you don't understand all of it, that's ok)
  - Read pp. 101 through 135 closely
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Exam 2 distributed in class!!! Due at the beginning of class  
on Wednesday 11/7!!!

PRESIDENTIAL STAFFING AND MANAGEMENT OF THE  
EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Wednesday 10/31  
and Monday 11/5

David E. Lewis (2005) Staffing Alone: Unilateral Action and the  
Politicization of the Executive Office of the President, 1988–2004.  
*Presidential Studies Quarterly*. 35(3): 496.

- Read entire article.

David E. Lewis (2007) FEMA's Politicization and the Road to Ka-  
trina. *Unpublished Manuscript*.

- Read entire article.
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**Part III: Presidents, The Media, and the Public**

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**Exam 2 due at the beginning of class on Wednesday 11/7!!!**

PRESIDENTIAL MEDIA PRACTICE

**Wednesday 11/7  
and Monday  
11/12**

Kernell (2007) *Going Public: New Strategies for Presidential Leadership*, 4th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

- Chapters 1 (pp. 1 through 9)
- Chapters 4 and 5 (pp. 74 through 147)

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**Exam 3 distributed in class on Monday 11/21. Due at the beginning of class on Wednesday 11/28!!!**

**Wednesday 11/14  
and Monday  
11/19**

THE EFFECTS OF PRESIDENTIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Brandice Canes-Wrone (2006) *Who Leads Whom? Presidents, Policy, and the Public*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Chapters 2, 3, and 4 (pp. 15 through 102)

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**Wednesday 11/21**

Thanksgiving Break, No Lecture.

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## Part IV: Debating Recent Topics in Presidential Politics

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### FRONT-LOADING THE PRIMARIES

Democratic National Committee Current National Party Rules and State Laws Affecting the Timing of the Nominating Process (Posted at the DNC's website, available on blackboard)

Monday 11/26  
and Wednesday  
11/28,  
Monday 12/3 and  
Wednesday 12/5,  
Monday 12/10  
and Wednesday  
12/12,

Adam Nagourney "Early Primary Rush Upends '08 Campaign," *The Washington Post*. March 12, 2007.

Hendrik Hertzberg "Pileup," *The New Yorker*. April 16, 2007.

### PRESIDENTIAL SIGNING STATEMENTS

Phillip Cooper (2005) George W. Bush, Edgar Allen Poe, and the Use and Abuse of Presidential Signing Statements. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. 35(3): 515.

### PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC PRECEDING THE IRAQ WAR

Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner (2005) Shaping Public Opinion: the 9/11-Iraq Connection in the Bush Administration's Rhetoric. *Perspectives on Politics*. 3(3): 525.

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