

# POLS 4940: The Presidency (Independent Study)

Dr. Keith E. Lee Jr.

Spring 2018

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## Course Description<sup>1</sup>

“The presidency has made every man who occupied it, no matter how small, bigger than he was; and no matter how big, not big enough for its demands.” ~ LBJ

This course examines the presidency across time in order to offer students the ability to understand current events as they compare to the past. The course will spend the first half of the semester examining the conception of the presidency and tracking the historical development up to the Great Depression. You'll also be reading Neustadt's influential book on how modern scholars understand presidential power. The second half of the course examines the presidency from FDR to Trump with an emphasis on increased presidential authority over the last 86 years. The second half will also include a reading of Howell's book that challenged Neustadt's central thesis arguing that presidents can change policy without consent.

This course does *not* dive into the daily operations of the president, but I am more than happy to recommend readings and discuss specific questions. Nevertheless, by the end of the course students will have a deeper, richer understanding of the presidency, past and present.

## Required Readings

- Howell, William G. 2003. *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action* [Amazon](#) (\$40 New | \$33 Used | \$33 Kindle)
- Milkis, Sidney M. & Michael Nelson. 2015. *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776-2014* 7th edition. [Amazon](#) (\$58 New | \$52 Used | \$49 Kindle | \$17 Rent)
- Neustadt, Richard E. 1991. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* Revised Edition. [Amazon](#) (\$18 New | \$13 Used)
- Skowronek, Stephen. 1997. *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton, Revised Edition* Revised Edition. [Amazon](#) (\$28 New | \$24 Used)

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<sup>1</sup>I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus at any time. Students will be notified when changes are made.

## Course Objectives

By the end of the semester you will be able to:

- recall the events that led to a national executive;
- summarize the historical development of the presidency from Washington to Trump;
- differentiate between various eras of presidential time;
- evaluate and synthesize arguments surrounding presidential power;
- apply presidential scholarship and theory to the current president.

## Course Assignments

**Exam #1 (Due March 16):** The midterm exam will be an oral exam lasting approximately 30-45 minutes to assess your mastery of the course material covered in the first half of the semester. The oral exam is meant to be conversational and will mirror, in many ways, our biweekly discussions. However, this one will be graded so it is important you review your notes from our meetings and from your reading. The exam will consist of questions from Milkis & Nelson Chapters 1-9, Skowronek Chapters 1-6, and current events.

**Book Review #1 (Due March 18):** You will begin the semester with Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. This classic work has shaped the way scholars think about presidential power and leadership. You will read this book and turn in a book review ([tips for an academic book review](#)). The review should be roughly 750-1000 words and must not exceed four pages using standard font, spacing, and margins.

**Exam #2 (Due April 27):** The final exam will be an oral exam lasting approximately 30-45 minutes to assess your mastery of the course material covered in the second half of the semester. The oral exam is meant to be conversational and will mirror, in many ways, our biweekly discussions. However, this one will be graded so it is important you review your notes from our meetings and from your reading. The exam will consist of questions from Milkis & Nelson Chapters 10-15, Skowronek Chapters 7 & 8, and current events.

**Political Time Essay (Due April 29):** You must write a brief essay extending Skowronek's argument to include the presidencies of George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump. How do these presidents fit into Skowronek's typologies and what does this say about the next president? The paper should be roughly 500-750 words and must not exceed three pages using standard font, spacing, and margins.

**Book Review #2 (Due May 6):** The second half of your semester will begin with William Howell's *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action*. This book challenges Neustadt's thesis that presidential power relies on their ability to persuade. You will read this book and submit a book review very similar to the one completed above, with an additional section that offers a critical reflection on how both books inform our assessment of the current president. The review should be roughly 750-1000 words and must not exceed four pages using standard font, spacing, and margins.

## Specification Grading

Specification grading is something I am trying for the first time this semester. All of your assignments will be graded as Pass/Fail and you will know exactly what is required for a passing grade. The purpose for this is to (hopefully) avoid the subjectivity of grading and to save you the urge to email asking why your paper was a 93 instead of a 97 or an 84 instead of a 90. Numerical grading, even with a strong rubric, is challenging and often inconsistent. Therefore, we will use specification grading and you get to determine your final grade in the class by completing one of the following “bundles.” The bundles must be completed as prescribed, i.e., you do not get to swap assignments. For example, if you complete the political time essay, the midterm exam, and a book review with a “Sat” you will still fail the course. You **MUST** complete the bundle as specified. Finally, I will give students the opportunity to revise and resubmit assignments that are borderline (which I realize is subjective, but I am doing my best). Students that receive an “R & R” will be given detailed feedback on how to make their assignment satisfactory and will be given one week to resubmit after the feedback is delivered.

| Bundle | Satisfactory Grade on:                              |
|--------|---|
| A      | Both Book Reviews, Political Time Essay, Both Exams |
| B      | Political Time Essay & Both Exams                   |
| C      | Both Exams  |
| D      | Political Time Essay                                |
| F      | None of the above                                   |

## Course Policies:

- **Office Hours and Contact:** Office hours are stated on the front page of the syllabus. I will be in my office to assist students during the times listed UNLESS an emergency arises in which case I will notify students. Students can contact me using GeorgiaView, Slack, and email ([keith.lee@gcsu.edu](mailto:keith.lee@gcsu.edu)), though Slack is preferred.
- **Late Policy:** No assignments will be accepted after the due date. Every assignment will be posted with ample time to complete them, thus a medical/family emergency on the due date is not an acceptable excuse. Get your work done early and you should not have any issues.
- **Attendance and Absences:** There is not an attendance policy for this course, however it is the student’s responsibility to keep up with the course schedule.
- **Academic dishonesty:** Cheating, including plagiarism, will not be tolerated and will result in an “F” in the course. This class will use plagiarism detection via GeorgiaView.
- Please read these additional [common syllabus statements](#) provided by Georgia College.

## **Class Schedule**

The reading schedule below should be adhered to so that you do not fall behind and you are prepared to discuss the material during our bi-weekly meetings. There is not a lot of reading for this class, at least compared to other classes you have taken with me, therefore I expect you to spend enough time with the material assigned that you understand it completely.

**TAP** refers to Milkis & Nelson; **PPM** refers to Skowronek. The number in [ ] is the approximate number of pages assigned for the week.

*Note: Neustadt and Howells readings in the calendar are suggested readings in order to keep the [~x] number of pages fairly equal each week and to prevent you from trying to read each book the week the book review is due. Our biweekly meetings will only cover the readings outlined in TAP and PPM from the previous two weeks.*

### **Week 01, 01/15 - 01/19: The Constitutional Convention**

- TAP Chapters 1 & 2; PPM Chapter 1; Neustadt Chapter 1 [~92 pages]
- Meet to go over syllabus

### **Week 02, 01/22 - 01/26: Bringing the Constitutional Presidency to Life**

- TAP Chapter 3; PPM Chapters 2 & 3; Neustadt Chapters 2 & 3 [~110 pages]

### **Week 03, 01/29 - 02/02: The Triumph of Jeffersonianism**

- TAP Chapter 4; PPM Chapter 4 [~95 pages]
- Meet to discuss week 1 and 2 readings

### **Week 04, 02/05 - 02/09: The Age of Jackson**

- TAP Chapter 5; PPM Chapter 5 [~100 pages]

### **Week 05, 02/12 - 02/16: The Presidency of Lincoln**

- TAP Chapter 6; PPM pp. 198-227; Neustadt Chapters 4 & 5 [~90 pages]
- Meet to discuss week 3 and 4 readings

### **Week 06, 02/19 - 02/23: The Reaction Against Presidential Power**

- TAP Chapter 7; Neustadt 6 & 7 [~100 pages]

### **Week 07, 02/26 - 03/02: Progressive Politics and Executive Power**

- TAP Chapter 8; PPM pp. 228-259; Neustadt Chapter 8 [~95 pages]
- Meet to discuss week 5 and 6 readings

**Week 08, 03/05 - 03/09: The Triumph of Conservative Republicanism**

- TAP Chapter 9; PPM pp. 260-286; Neustadt Chapters 9 & 10 [~110 pages]

**Week 09, 03/12 - 03/16: Exam Week**

- Neustadt Chapters 11-13 [~90 pages]
- Meet with me to take your first exam
- Submit book review #1 by Sunday at 9pm

**Week 10, 03/19 - 03/23: Spring Break**

**Week 11, 03/26 - 03/30: The Consolidation of the Modern Presidency**

- TAP Chapter 10; PPM pp. 287-324 [~87 pages]

**Week 12, 04/02 - 04/06: Personalizing the Presidency**

- TAP Chapter 11; PPM pp. 325-406 [~127 pages]
- Meet to discuss week 11 readings

**Week 13, 04/09 - 04/13: A Restoration of Presidential Power?**

- TAP Chapter 12 & 13; PPM Chapter 8 [~95 pages]

**Week 14, 04/16 - 04/20: George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Modern Presidential Power**

- TAP Chapter 14 & 15; Howell Chapters 1 & 2 [~100 pages]
- Meet to discuss week 12 and 13 readings

**Week 15, 04/23 - 04/27: Toward a New Theory of Presidential Power**

- Meet with me to take your second exam
- Submit your Political Time Essay by 9pm Sunday
- Howell Chapters 3 & 4 [~55 pages]

**Week 16, 04/30 - 05/04: President, Congress, and the Court**

- Howell Chapters 5-7 [~85 pages]
- Submit book review #2 by 9pm on Sunday

**Week 17, 05/07 - 05/11: Final Exam Week**

- Nothing due this week unless you received an R & R on the book review. Good luck on your other finals!