

THE UNITED STATES PRESIDENCY

POLITICAL SCIENCE 121A
WINTER QUARTER
2015

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

Professor Matthew N. Beckmann

Course Information

Department of Political Science
2253 Social Science B
(949) 824-6219
beckmann@uci.edu

Tuesdays & Thursdays 2 – 3:20
Parkview Classroom Bldg. 1100

Office Hours:
Tues and Thurs 1:30 – 2, & by appt.

TAs:
Archie Delshad (adelshad@uci.edu)
Ksenia Gracheva (gracheva@uci.edu)
Jen Jones (jonesjj@uci.edu)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Contemporary American presidents are correctly labeled “the most powerful man in the world” during their time in office. Yet presidents are often shocked – not to mention frustrated – to find the Oval Office confers fewer powers than they had expected when moving to Washington. White House reporters tend to carp; members of Congress tend to look out for themselves; bureaucrats tend to drag their feet. Is it any wonder that experienced presidents often question their own influence? President Truman declared, “I sit here all day trying to persuade people to do the things they ought to have the sense to do without my persuading them. That's all the powers of the President amount to.” Lyndon Johnson went further: “Being president is like being a jackass in a hailstorm. There’s nothing to do but stand there and take it.”

This course examines the US presidency’s place in contemporary American politics. For example, we will investigate how presidents decide their policy priorities; what factors affect presidents’ public standing; what conditions shape the president’s relationship with Congress; and so on. In each, our strategy will be to unpack various explanations political scientists have offered and assess those with evidence, and having carefully studied the presidency across these spheres, we will conclude the course by bringing our informed insights to bear on some of the most important questions confronting presidents and scholars alike: What makes a president “great?” What is leadership? Why do some presidents succeed and others fail?

REQUIRED READINGS

Matthew Beckmann, *Pushing the Agenda*
Brendan Doherty, *The Rise of the President’s Permanent Campaign*
Coursepack (available for download on course website)

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

I designed this course to introduce you to presidential politics, with a special emphasis on developing students’ analytical skills. Thus I hope you’ll finish this course better able to understand what politicians and pundits are talking about, better able to place their actions in a broader context, and better able to assess and evaluate their competing proposals, claims, and evidence. In short, this course helps you become savvy political consumers.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I take integrity issues very seriously, largely because I trust you to act honorably. Suffice it to say, you should abide by the highest standards in this course. I expect you to act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can thrive through the fruits of their efforts. Cheating, plagiarism, or any other violations of these principles will result in a failing grade for the course and a referral to the Dean’s office.

ROCKETMIX MODULES (<https://www.rocketmix.com/EnrollCourse.aspx?CourseCode=67140>)

Complementing the work we do in class, I have created a series of online modules that build upon particular lessons. These modules offer various analytical exercises that give students (and me) immediate, personalized feedback. The whole batch costs \$20, which you pay when signing up at rocketmix.com. To get full credit, you must complete the module *before lecture* on the date it is due.

The five modules for this course are....

Recess Appointments	Open Date 1/6	Due Date 1/13
Presidential Honeymoons	Open Date 1/15	Due Date 1/22
The Great Communicator!?	Open Date 1/29	Due Date 2/5
The Johnson Treatment	Open Date 2/12	Due Date 2/19
Ranking Presidents	Open Date 3/5	Due Date 3/12

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

If you have a special circumstance that affects your ability to meet the course’s expectations – e.g., a brother’s wedding, a learning disability, or anything else – contact me about it right away. So long as it does not compromise fairness for all, I am happy to help.

COURSE GRADING (I’ll provide more information about each as it approaches)

Section	10 %
Research	10 %
Rocketmix	15 %
Midterm	30 %
Final	35 %

INTRODUCTION

- T 1/6 Getting Started
- Cronin & Genovese, ch. 1
 - Kennedy, *Speech: The Presidency in 1960*
- ROCKETMIX MODULE (RECESS APPOINTMENTS) OPEN – DUE 1/13
- Th 1/8 The Founding
- Federalist Papers 69, 70
 - Tulis, “The Two Constitutional Presidencies”
- T 1/13 The Myth of the “Great Man”
- Beckmann, ch. 1
- Th 1/15 Studying the Presidency
- King, “The Methodology of Presidential Research”
- ROCKETMIX MODULE (HONEYMOON) OPEN – DUE 1/22

FROM CAMPAIGNING TO GOVERNING

- T 1/20 Video: *The War Room*
- Th 1/22 On Mandates and Honeymoons
- Brody, ch. 2
 - President Bush, Press Conference, 11/3/2004
- T 1/27 Hitting the Ground Running
- Gergen, ch. 8
 - Edwards, “Why Not the Best?”

RUNNING THE WHITE HOUSE - POLITICS

- Th 1/29 The Permanent Campaign
- Doherty, ch. 1-3
- ROCKETMIX MODULE (GREAT COMMUNICATOR) OPEN – DUE 2/5
- T 2/3 Presidents and the Press
- Doherty, ch. 4
 - Auletta, *The New Yorker*, 1/19/2004
- Th 2/5 Presidents and Public Opinion
- Green, “The Other War Room” in *The Washington Monthly*, 4/02
 - Klein, “The Unpersuaded” in *The New Yorker*, 3/19/12
- T 2/10 ***** **MIDTERM** xxx **MIDTERM** *****

RUNNING THE WHITE HOUSE - POLICY

PART A: DEVELOPING THE POLICIES

- Th 2/12 Research Day
 ROCKETMIX MODULE (LBJ TREATMENT) OPEN – DUE 2/19
- T 2/17 Drafting the President's Policies
 - Beckmann, ch. 6
 - Doherty, ch. 5

PART B: PROMOTING THE POLICIES

- Th 2/19 Promoting the President's Policies: Positive
 - Beckmann, ch. 4-5
- T 2/24 Promoting the President's Policies: Negative
 - Cameron, "The Presidential Veto" in the Oxford Handbook

PART C: IMPLEMENTING THE POLICIES

- Th 2/26 "Controlling" the Bureaucracy
 - Lewis & Moe, pp. 374-405
 - Baker, "The CIA Kept Bush III Informed" in NYT
- T 3/3 The Battle over the Courts
 - TBD

THE SECOND PRESIDENCY (FOREIGN AFFAIRS)

- Th 3/5 Presidents in Foreign Affairs & *Cheney's Law*
 - Yoo, *Wall Street Journal*, 3/15/1999
 ROCKETMIX MODULE (RANKING PRESIDENTS) OPEN – DUE 3/12

ASSESSING PRESIDENTS AND THE PRESIDENCY

- T 3/10 Presidents, Budgets, the Fed, and the Economy
 - Abrams, "How Nixon Pressured Burns" in *JEP*
- Th 3/12 Meshing the Man, the Office, and the Historical Context
 - George Washington, *Farewell Address*
 - Abraham Lincoln, *Gettysburg Address*
- Th 3/19 ***** **FINAL** **1:30 - 3:30PM** **FINAL** *****