

POLS 229 (28012)

John Van Benthuyssen

Fall 2012

2BSB 367

University of Illinois at Chicago

TR 12:30-1:45

The American Presidency

This course coincides with the 2012 American presidential election campaign and provides a unique opportunity for students to study the American presidency in what is likely to be an historic election. Students will study the diverse issues that motivate presidential campaigns and which intersect with Congress and the Public. Classes will blend the past with the present and discuss readings that shed light on this year's election. The course will cover a diverse range of topics including: American government, democracy, political behavior, public opinion, and voting. These topics will be explored primarily as they relate the presidency to the public, congress, national security, policy making, and abuses of power.

Course Goals

1. Foster interest in and engagement with American government.
2. Provide an understanding of the structure and principles of the American presidency and federal government.
3. Enhance critical thinking over the issues that motivate elections.

Books

James P. Pfiffner. 2010. The Modern Presidency. Wadsworth Publishing, 5th or 6th edition. **(Required)**

Stephen J. Wayne. 2010. Is This Any Way to Run a Democratic Election? CQ Press, 4th edition. **(Required)**

Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2011. Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America. Longman, 3rd edition. **(Required)**

***I encourage students to purchase used copies of these books via Amazon or Abe Books.

Office Hours and Contact Info

Office	1170A BSB
Office Hours	Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:45-2:45 and by appointment
Email	jvanbe1@uic.edu

Course Requirements

Informed Voter Project (6 pages) 30%

Mid Term Exam 30%

Final Exam 30%

Participation 10%

Grade Scale: A 90-100, B 80-89, C 70-79, D 60-69, F 59 and below.

The Course

This course explores the American presidency and its interconnections with the public, congress, national security, elections, and policy-making. Students will participate in class discussions and this requires keeping up with assigned readings. The quality of the class and your grade depend on your informed participation. Alternative methods of assessment will be used if class participation begins to wane i.e. regular quizzes on weekly readings.

Most classes will begin with a brief discussion of presidential campaign news. Students are expected to keep up with campaign events and participate regularly by bringing up articles and questions in class. News sources may include local, national, and international media (online news and magazine articles, blogs, and print media are acceptable). Class will then turn to a mix of lecture and discussion of weekly readings.

Students will be assessed by an Informed Voter project (30%), mid term (30%), final exam (30%), and quality of their participation (10%).

Informed Voter Project

All students will follow the 2012 presidential election campaign and will read and collect local, national, and international media on the topic. Students are required to read one media source each week beginning Sept 20 and ending Nov 1 for a total of six media sources. Write a brief summary (1/2 page) and your reaction (1/2 page) for each media piece. Projects must consist of at least 1 entry from each of the following sources for a total of 6 sources (you can double two media types).

1. Local Newspaper/web article (Chicago Tribune, Sun Times and other smallville papers).
2. National Newspaper/Magazine/web article (Washington Post, Time, NY Times, blog etc).
3. International Newspaper/Magazine/web article (Al Jazeera, BBC, the Economist, Pravda etc).
4. Official campaign site/material.

This assignment is not an opinion piece and students are expected to draw upon course material in their weekly responses. In addition your media sources must cover the following campaign issues at least once, you can cover only one of the issue areas twice.

1. Economy/Jobs/Taxes
2. National Security (foreign wars, War on Terror, nuclear proliferation etc)
3. Immigration/Civil Rights
4. Education/Healthcare
5. Culture issues (gay marriage, abortion, gun rights etc)

The final version of your project should be at least 6 pages long. The layout of the project should be as follows: a (2 page) summary of your expectations going into the assignment and brief discussion of what sources and issues you wanted to focus on and why; the body should include brief reflections on all of your media sources which evaluates how relevant the pieces were in light of the election result, who got it right or wrong? (2 pages); the final section should evaluate what you learned about the presidency/campaigns/democracy and make broader connections with class discussions and readings (2 pages). Projects should have a bibliography listing all sources. **Due Tuesday November 20**, worth 30 points or 30% of your final grade.

Mid Term

The mid term exam will be composed of three parts: identifications, short answer, and long essay. Identifications involve a one or two sentence response, short answers require a paragraph response, and essays are expected to be at least 2 pages with an introduction, body, and conclusion. All questions will derive from assigned readings, lectures, and anything viewed and discussed in class. You will be expected to write a coherent, well thought out essay incorporating issues and concepts discussed in class. The mid term is **Thursday October 18** and will be worth 30 points, representing 30% of your final grade.

Final Exam

The final exam will not be cumulative. All questions will derive from class discussions and readings. The format is the same as the mid term: identifications, short answer, and long essay. The final exam is **Tuesday December 11** and will be worth 30 points, representing 30% of your final grade.

Participation

Participation is showing up and contributing to class regularly. Asking questions, bringing up news articles or following up on points discussed in class counts towards your participation grade. In order to meaningfully participate students must keep up with scheduled readings, classes, and stay abreast of presidential campaign news.

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Students that are absent will be expected to notify the instructor ahead of time (at least a day in advance) or in cases of emergency have appropriate documentation. Assignments handed in late will not be accepted without documentation.

After three unexcused absences each additional unexcused absence will result in the drop of half a letter grade. Participation will be worth 10 points and represents 10% of the final grade.

Course Outline

A. The Presidency

1. Origins and Powers
2. Separation of Powers
3. National Security
4. Abuse of Power

B. Elections

1. Representation
2. Money
3. Media
4. Parties

C. Issues and the Electorate

1. Elite Polarization
2. the Economy
3. Foreign Affairs
4. Culture Wars

Academic Integrity

UIC is committed to providing an environment in which research and learning can flourish. This requires academic integrity. Students are expected to be familiar with and follow the guidelines regarding UIC standards of academic integrity.

Schedule of Course Readings, Assignments, and Exams

August 28 Tues: First Day of Class, hand out syllabus, discuss course goals.

August 30 Thurs: Discuss the presidency and the public: Pfiffner, chapters 1 and 2.

September 4 Tues: Discuss presidential organization: Pfiffner, chapter 3.

September 6 Thurs: Discuss executive branch: Pfiffner, chapter 4.

September 11 Tues: Discuss Congress: Pfiffner, chapter 5 p. 131-152.

September 13 Thurs: Discuss Congress: Pfiffner, chapter 5 p. 152-180.

September 18 Tues: Discuss problems with democratic elections: Wayne, chapter 1.

September 20 Thurs: **First campaign project entry due.** Discuss the
American electorate: Wayne, chapter 2.

September 25 Tues: Discuss issues of representation: Wayne, chapter 3.

September 27 Thurs: **Second campaign project entry due.** Discuss money in
elections: Wayne, chapter 4.

October 2 Tues: Discuss the media in elections: Wayne, chapter 5.

October 4 Thurs: **Third campaign project entry due.** Discuss the issue of
Culture Wars: Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, chapters 1 and 2.

October 9 Tues: Discuss Red states-Blues states: Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, chapter
3.

October 11 Thurs: **Fourth campaign project entry due.** Discuss national security:
Pfiffner, chapter 6.

October 16 Tues: Review session for Mid Term Exam.

October 18 Thurs: **Mid Term Exam.**

October 23 Tues: Watch “Wag the Dog” (1997) 97 minutes.

October 25 Thurs: **Fifth campaign project entry due.** Finish “Wag the Dog.”
Discuss abuse of presidential power: Pfiffner, chapter 7.

October 30 Tues: Discuss political parties: Wayne, chapter 6.

November 1 Thurs: **Sixth campaign project entry due.** Discuss the
Nomination process: Wayne, chapter 7.

November 6 Tues: 2012 Presidential Election. Go vote but don’t miss class! Discuss
Red states and Blues states: Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, chapter 4.

November 8 Thurs: Discuss abortion: Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, chapter 5.

November 13 Tues: Discuss homosexuality: Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, chapter 6.

November 15 Thurs: Discuss electoral cleavages: Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope,
chapter 7.

November 20 Tues: **Informed Voter projects due.** Discuss polarized political
class: Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, chapter 8 and 9.

November 22 Thurs: Thanksgiving Break, no class.

November 27 Tues: Discuss campaigns: Wayne, chapter 8.

November 29 Thurs: Discuss quality of connection between elections and government: Wayne, chapter 9.

December 4 Tues: Discuss the future of presidential elections: Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, chapter 10 and Epilogue.

December 6 Thurs: Last Day of Class, review session for final exam.

December 11 Tues: **Final Exam.**

December 13 Thurs: Final Exams week, no class, Enjoy the Break!