

**POLS 469: The Obama Presidency:  
Using Political Science to Understand the Modern Office**

Spring 2009

Mondays 3:30-5:50, BSB 1115

Professor: Dr. Nicole Kazee

Email: nkazee@uic.edu

Office hours: Wed 2-4pm or by appointment

Office: 1108D, BSB

Office phone: 312.413.2186

**Course Description**

Much of the literature on the American presidency draws clear distinctions between historic and modern presidents. Certainly, there has never been a more modern president than Barack Obama. A multi-national, multi-racial, basketball-playing, Blackberry-toting, 48 year old law professor, Obama is a phenomenon that would have baffled the Founders.

This course will pursue two goals simultaneously. First, we will take a close look at contemporary political science scholarship to understand the modern presidency and the powers and limitations of the institution. Unlike most advanced presidency courses, which focus on the “seminal” works, this course will look largely at brand new research and assessments. (Graduate students will be required to read some of these older texts, and can expect to gain sufficient background in the topic to be commensurate with a more traditional presidency course.)

Second, we will use this scholarship as the basis for a case study of our most modern president. This will include reading popular accounts from journalistic or other non-academic sources, and subjecting them to academic analysis in an effort to understand and evaluate President Obama’s election and the choices he has made since taking office. We will take a comparative approach, evaluating him relative to other modern presidents (primarily Bush and Clinton). And we will take full advantage of having the ability to watch Obama’s leadership style develop in real time, using current events to continuously update our assessment of the modern institution.

The course is designed primarily for advanced undergraduates who have done coursework in American government or related topics, as well as political science graduate students of all levels. Students from other departments are encouraged to contact the instructor for permission to enroll.

**Course Requirements:**

*Grading:*

Participation: 15%

Memo/discussion leading: 15%

Exam: 30%

Research paper: 40%

*Paper (40%):*

You are required to write one major paper for this course. This will be a 10-15 page research paper (20-30 pages for graduate students) comparing one aspect of the Obama presidency to that of another modern president (i.e., anyone starting with FDR). It is strongly advised that you choose a topic that corresponds to one of the weeks of the course (e.g., the presidents' foreign policy strategies, their relationships with Congress, their court nominations, their elections, the vice presidencies, etc). *Graduate students may propose a different paper topic related to the presidency. Please see the instructor to discuss possible topics.*

This will be a strongly analytical paper. Rather than merely reporting research results about these presidents, you will be asked to present an argument about how they have approached the office of the modern presidency in similar or different ways. Proper formatting and documentation for a research paper is required. Each student must discuss his or her paper topic with me by the week after Spring Break (3/29). More details will be forthcoming.

**Papers are due on the last day of class (4/26).** I MUST HAVE HARD COPIES OF YOUR PAPERS (NOT JUST EMAIL ATTACHMENTS). Unless you have received a deadline extension from me prior to the 19<sup>th</sup>, a late paper will receive a grade deduction of 5 points for each day (including weekends) it is late.

*Exam (30%):*

You will have one cumulative final exam in this course. It will be held at the time assigned by the university. Further details will be provided.

If you miss an exam, the grade is automatically a "0," unless you have been excused by me (the only valid excuses are medical emergencies and deaths in the family, both of which require documented evidence of the situation). If you know in advance that you absolutely have to miss an exam, consult with me at least one week in advance and you will be able to take the test *before* the scheduled test date.

*Memo/Discussion Leading (15%):*

You will sign up for one week when you will be responsible for writing a 2-3 page discussion memo on that week's readings. The two main components of this memo will be a critical assessment of the readings (are there parts you disagree with or that don't make sense to you?), and an application of the readings to the Obama presidency. The memo is due to me no later than **ONE HOUR** before class begins.

During this session, you will be the discussion leader. I will give you a list of discussion questions that you are expected to think carefully about, and you will also be asked to come up with your own discussion questions based on the readings.

*Participation (15%):*

The success of this class will depend on class attendance and your willingness to participate actively in discussions. (If voluntary contributions are insufficient, I reserve the right to call on students randomly.)

Because there are so few class sessions, each one is essential. Therefore, I will be taking attendance every week. Your attendance will factor into your participation grade. Also, if you miss class – even if your absence is excused – you are still responsible for finding out what was covered. Remember, all lectures are fair game on the exam.

This class is very tied to current events, and for that reason I expect you all to follow national news closely. We will start most classes with a short discussion about what has happened with the President since our last class meeting. **These discussions are also fair game on the exam.**

This course assumes a certain amount of background knowledge on the American political system. It is your responsibility to fill in the gaps of your knowledge. If you don't understand something, LOOK IT UP. (Hint: Wikipedia may be a *terrible* resource for research papers, but it can be the quickest and easiest way to get up to speed on a particular term or concept.) You can also always come to me for help.

#### *Required Readings:*

This is a reading heavy course. You will be asked to read standard political science scholarship on the presidency as well as contemporary reports on President Obama and his administration. Because of the current nature of the course subject, I will also be adding short readings as new events transpire and new analyses come available.

Required text for all students:

- Cronin, Thomas E. and Michael A. Genovese. 2010 (third edition). *The Paradoxes of the American Presidency*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- All chapters and articles available through online library reserves. (There will be no reading packet – you are responsible for accessing and printing all readings.)

Graduate students are also advised to purchase the following:

- Tulis, Jeffrey K. 1987. *The Rhetorical Presidency*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Neustadt, Richard E. 1990. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. The Free Press: New York.
- Milkis, Sydney. 1993. *The President and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System Since the New Deal*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kernell, Samuel. 1997. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*. 3rd ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

- Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr. 2004 (1973). *The Imperial Presidency*. Boston, MA: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Company. MAKE SURE YOU GET THIS NEW EDITION!

### **Academic Honesty:**

Cheating and plagiarism (a form of cheating) will not be tolerated. You must write your own papers and your own exams. Any student caught cheating will receive a failing grade in the class and be referred to the administration for disciplinary actions. Keep in mind that the technology that allows students to retrieve papers from the Internet also allows instructors to find those papers.

It would be a good idea to familiarize yourself with university policies on this.

### **Special Needs:**

If you need any special accommodations for this course you must be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS). You can contact them at 312.413.2183. Please also let me know in person or by email at the start of the semester so that appropriate accommodations may be made.

### **Email Policy:**

You are encouraged to email me at any time. However, there is a protocol for this. Be careful that you use proper salutation. In the case of this course and most university courses, that is as simple as “Hello Professor \_\_\_\_\_” or “Hi Dr. \_\_\_\_\_.”

The proper form of address for university instructors, unless otherwise specified, is Professor or Dr. (the latter is best for those of us holding doctoral degrees, which is most of us). Please do not send me email addressed to Ms., Mrs., or Miss Kaze. In some contexts that’s perfectly polite, but not in a university setting. (And anyway, those make me think of my mom, and while she would be happy to share embarrassing stories about me, she does not teach this class.)

## **Schedule (SUBJECT TO REVISION):**

*\*Note that graduate students have additional required readings.*

### **Week 1 (1/11): Introduction**

#### **Week 2 (1/25): How do we evaluate a president? (70)**

- *Paradoxes*, Chapters 1 and 2 (1-54)
- Wilentz, Sean. 2006. "The Worst President in History?" *Rolling Stone*. May 4.  
[http://www.rollingstone.com/news/profile/story/9961300/the\\_worst\\_president\\_in\\_history](http://www.rollingstone.com/news/profile/story/9961300/the_worst_president_in_history)
- Dewitt, Larry. 2006. "Should Historians Try to Rank President Bush's Presidency?" (Response to Wilentz article.) *History News Network*. May 22.  
<http://hnn.us/articles/24470.html>
- Recent Obama approval rating data (READING TBA)
- *No additional graduate reading*

#### **Week 3 (2/1): The presidential election of 2008: from Iowa to Washington (45)**

- *Paradoxes*, Chapter 3 (55-91)
- McDonald, Michael. 2008. "Why the Rules Mattered in the Nomination Race," The Brookings Institution.  
[http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/0604\\_frontloading\\_mcdonald.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/0604_frontloading_mcdonald.aspx)
- Linn, Suzanne, Jonathan Moody, and Stephanie Asper. 2009. "Explaining the Horse Race of 2008," *PS: Political Science and Politics* July 2009: 459-465
- *\*Graduate reading:* Ceasar, James W. *Presidential Selection: Theory and Development*. 1979. Pages 3-40.

#### **Week 4 (2/8): Defining the "modern" presidency (75)**

- *Paradoxes*, Chapter 5 (114-150)
- Fred I. Greenstein, "Change and Continuity in the Modern Presidency," in Anthony King, ed., *The New American Political System* (Washington, DC: AEI, 1979) pp. 45-86.
- *\*Graduate reading:* Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, Chs 1, 2, 6

#### **Week 5 (2/15): Presidential power: skills vs institutional capacities (70)**

- *Paradoxes*, Chapter 4 (92-113)
- Howell, William and Douglas Kriner. 2008. "Power Without Persuasion: Identifying Executive Influence," in *Presidential Leadership: The Vortex of Power*, ed. Bert A. Rockman and Richard W. Waterman. New York: Oxford University Press. (105-135)
- *\*Graduate reading:* Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, Chs 1-3 (60 pages)

**Week 6 (2/22): Presidential leadership (health reform case study) (25)**

- Barrett, Andrew W. 2005. "Going Public as a Legislative Weapon: Measuring Presidential Appeals Regarding Specific Legislation," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35 (1): 1-10.
- Greenstein, Fred I. 2009. "The Leadership Style of Barack Obama: An Early Assessment," *The Forum* 7(1): Article 6. 1-9.
- Additional readings on health reform (TBA)
- \*Graduate reading: Kernell, Samuel. 1997. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*. 3rd ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, Chapters 1-2 (1-64).

**Week 7 (3/1): Obama and race politics**

- **NOTE:** All students will attend the Institute for the Humanities Visiting Fellow Seminar Series lecture by Adolph L. Reed entitled "Obama, Antiracism, and Building the American Left." I will pre-register all students for the talk.
  - **The seminar starts at 3pm (if you must come late, let me know in advance).** Location is the Lower Level of Stevenson Hall.
- Main readings TBA. (Note that readings will likely come from this website: [www.uic.edu/depts/huminst/visitingfellows](http://www.uic.edu/depts/huminst/visitingfellows))
- Dowd, Maureen. 2009. "Boy, Oh Boy," *The New York Times*, Sept 12. Available here: [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/opinion/13dowd.html?\\_r=1&emc=eta1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/opinion/13dowd.html?_r=1&emc=eta1)

**Week 8 (3/8): Obama and Congress (65)**

- *Paradoxes*, Chapter 6 (151-178)
- Rudalevige, Andrew. 2006. "The Decline and Resurgence and Decline (and Resurgence?) of Congress: Charting a New Imperial Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36(3): 506-524.
- Nelson, Michael. 2004. "George W. Bush and Congress: The Electoral Connection," in *Considering the Bush Presidency*, ed. Gary L. Gregg and Mark J. Rozell. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P. 141-160.
- \*Graduate reading: Schlesinger, Chapters 1 and 2

**Week 9 (3/15): Obama and Foreign Policy (34)**

- Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr. 2004 (1973). *The Imperial Presidency*. Boston, MA: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Company. Read "Back to the Imperial Presidency" (the Introduction to the Mariner Edition), pp ix-xxiv. (16 pages)
- Fisher, Louis. 2009. "Presidential Power in National Security: A Guide to the President-Elect," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 39 (2): 347-362.
- Cole, Juan. "Obama's Foreign Policy Report Card," *Salon.com*, Oct 26, 2009: [http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2009/10/26/obama\\_report\\_card/index.html](http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2009/10/26/obama_report_card/index.html) (Or something more recent if available)
- \*Graduate reading: Schlesinger, Epilogue

**Week 10 (3/29): Obama and the Courts (35)**

- *Paradoxes*, Chapter 9 (234-263)
- Fletcher, Michael A. "Obama Criticized as too Cautious, Slow on Judicial Posts," *Washington Post*, Oct 6, 2009: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/15/AR2009101504083.html?hpid=topnews> (OR POSSIBLY SOMETHING MORE RECENT)
- "Obama's Soyomayer Nomination Remarks," May 26, 2009. Available at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/30943237/>
- \*Graduate reading: Whittington, Keith. 2001. "Presidential Challenges to Judicial Supremacy and the Politics of Constitutional Meaning," *Polity* 33(3): 365-395.

**Week 11 (4/5):\_Obama and the executive branch (51)**

- *Paradoxes*, Chapter 7 (179-207)
- Rudalevige, Andrew. 2009. "Rivals, Or a Team?: Competitive Advisory Institutions and the Obama Administration," Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting: [http://papers.ssrn.com/Sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1450723](http://papers.ssrn.com/Sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1450723)
- \*Graduate reading: Aberback, Joel D. and Bert A. Rockman. 2009. "The Appointments Process and the Administrative Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 39(1): 38.

**Week 12 (4/12): Obama and the Democratic Party (52)**

- *Paradoxes*, Chapter 10 (264-282)
- Milkis, Sidney M. and Jesse H. Rhodes. 2009. "Barack Obama, the Democratic Party, and the Future of the 'New American Party System,'" *The Forum* 7(1): Article 7. 1-26.
- Goldstein, Dana and Ezra Klein. 2008. "It's His Party," *The American Prospect* September: 13-20.: [http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=its\\_his\\_party\\_08](http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=its_his_party_08)
- \*Graduate Reading: Milkis, *The President and the Parties*, Chs 3-6

**Week 13 (4/19): Vice Presidents**

- *Paradoxes*, Chapter 8 (208-233)
- *Considering the Bush Presidency*, Chapter 10: "Cheney and Vice Presidential Power" (160-176)
- *ARTICLE ABOUT BIDEN (TBA)*
- \*Graduate readings: Goldstein, Joel K. 2008. "The Rising Power of the Modern Vice Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 38 (3): 374-389. AND: Moe, Richard. 2008. "The Making of the Modern Vice Presidency: A Personal Reflection," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 38 (3): 390.

**Week 14 (4/26): Moving forward: evaluations and recommendations (PAPERS DUE)**

- New readings TBA
- Revisiting *Schlesinger* (from Week 2). Have we changed our minds at all about our assessments of Obama in January? Where would we rank him?
- Presentation of select papers?

Final Exam will be held at the time assigned by the university