INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE:

Forget everything you have seen in fictionalized accounts of the American presidency whether on television or cinema. And certainly forget all of the blather about what candidates for the presidency are saying on the stump or in debates about what they are going to do on Day 1 (or for that matter Day 732) of their presidencies should they be so chosen. They aren’t going to be in a position to do any of it. The accounts on the small screen or the big screen (that’s not a choice between your phone and your computer by the way) are unrealistic and are meant to entertain, not inform. That’s not a fault of the productions. Reality is more boring and we don’t like to partake of it. Similarly, presidential candidates trying to get their party’s nomination are trying to focus on some very intense constituencies and donors and make it appear as though they will stand firm (often in quicksand) for the cause of those whose support they currently most need in order to be viable. Despite all the ballyhoo about presidential elections and the magisterial role of the U.S. president, once elected to office presidents do not have infinite or expansive power to make their will reality. Far from it. Rather, they have greater or lesser opportunities for leverage depending upon the political context and situation and their ability to find openings to exploit opportunities.

This course examines the U.S. presidency from the perspective of its leadership role in the American political system, but it does so from the standpoint of political processes whereby presidents struggle to assert their power over other actors who also hold power and from the perspective that presidents represent some, not all, of the people. Presidential power is exercised within a system of institutional constraints and political conditions that may serve to inhibit it or promote it at different points in time. Identifying these conditions is important to analyzing the
presidential leadership role. Consequently, temporal (historical and cyclical) and comparative dimensions are important; that is, how has the presidency evolved over time? Are presidents more constrained or have more latitude depending upon cycles that occur in the context of leadership, in the economy, and within each president’s term in office? And in what ways can we compare the American presidency to top executive leadership roles in other constitutional political systems? From the vantage point of the political leadership role, the processes of presidential selection (nomination and election) are analyzed as are presidential capacities to sustain popular support and backing from other political leaders and key interests. The ways in which presidents differ in their leadership styles, their skills, their management of the executive branch, and their roles as decision makers are also analyzed for their consequences – and, conceivably, their lack thereof. The ways in which the office of the presidency and its responsibilities may be evolving also provide a focal point of examination. Attention is paid to different views of how presidents should use their leadership resources and, in particular, the question of whether the U.S. Presidency has become “imperial” or “imperiled”.

Two essential threads run throughout the course. One is that the American system was constitutionally designed to frustrate power and to disperse it, not to concentrate it. This frustrates most American presidents. The second is that there is no escaping the fact that normative perspectives color our attitudes about presidential power. If we are partisans of one party, we are usually happy with a president of that party and want that president to have more power. But we are typically hesitant to bestow that support upon a president of the other party. In other words, what the office should be and how much power it should have is largely a function of whether we are sympathetic or antithetic to the existing incumbent.

Books to be Purchased
There are four principal books to be purchased for the course. The book by Will Howell deals with the fundamental question of presidential power and the role of the president in governance. Two other books (Nelson 10th edition and Rockman and Waterman) are edited anthologies of original essays, theories, or research findings. A fourth book (Ellis and Nelson 3rd edition) is a compilation of debates concerning proposed reforms of the political system, especially the role of the presidency in it. Please make sure that you have the proper edition of each book.
The books are:


In addition, there will be some supplementary readings denoted by an asterisk. I will have more to say about these in class. The journal articles typically can be accessed on line through the Purdue library system or on the J-STORE on line archival system which is accessible through your Purdue account.

**Course Objectives**

Students should come away from this course with a clearer understanding of the relationship between political leaders and the institutional and situational constraints that place limitations on their leadership capabilities, and particularly so in the centrifugal American political system. Similarly, students should come away with a better understanding of how individual leaders matter and how, in most respects, they don’t. Finally, students should understand how much our own preferences of the moment influence whether or not we want the president to have more power or less.

**Course Assignments**

There will be three written assignments. Among these will be two short analytic essays (approximately 5-8 pages each) spaced over the course. I will pose a question to you which will require you to synthesize relevant readings and in-class lectures. You will have at least a week to work on each one. Each of these will
constitute 20% of your grade (40% for both). The final paper questions will be due back by December 14 by 6:00 P.M. You will select two questions, one from each set. Each response should be in the 5-8 page range. The final paper will constitute 40% of your grade. As a general matter, I pay attention to trend lines so that significant improvement over time, in the margins, will work to a student’s advantage. Participation and preparation are crucial, and these will count for the remaining 20% of your grade.

A Note About Plagiarism
Plagiarism constitutes the taking of someone else’s work without attribution. It is a very serious academic offense and carries with it potentially harsh sanctions. There are evident signs when something is not your own work. If you are at any time in doubt about whether you may be crossing the border, please see or talk to me.

Topics and Reading Schedule

August 25 – Introduction to the Course

August 27, Sept. 1, 3 – Presidents and the Problem of Power: Perspectives
Reading:
■ Howell, Preface and Chapters 1-3 (pp. ix-xiii; 1-70)
■ Waterman & Rockman, “What is Presidential Leadership? In Rockman and Waterman (eds.), Chapter 1 (1-17)

Sept. 8 – Normative Theories of Presidential Leadership: Demands and Constraints
Reading:
■ Howell, Chapter 4 (pp. 71-91)
■ Tulis, “The Two Constitutional Presidencies” in Nelson, 10th edition

September 10, 15 – Contexts of Power and Leadership
Institutional and Situational Contexts
Reading:

**September 15**

Temporal Contexts – Chronological and Political Time  
Reading:
  • Rockman, “The Evolution of the Presidency in the United States” (conference paper)  
  • Cohen, “Presidential Leadership in an Age of New Media” in Rockman and Waterman, pp. 171-190.  
  • Ellis and Nelson, pp. 94-108 (Skowronek v. Greenstein)

**September 17 and 22**

Getting There: Nominating and Electoral Processes  
Reading:
  • Ellis and Nelson, pp. 38-93 (Nelson v. Busch; Loomis v. Shafer; Karol v. Cronin)

**September 24**

Staying There: Political Maintenance and the Permanent Campaign  
Reading:
  • Edwards, “Impediments to Presidential Leadership: The Limitations of the Permanent Campaign and Going Public Strategies” in Rockman and Waterman, pp. 145-170

**September 29**

The Politics of Governing: The President, Interest Groups, and Parties
- Milkis, “The Presidency and Political Parties” in Nelson, 10th pp. 304-348

FIRST PAPER HANDED OUT OCT. 1

October 1 and 6
The President and Congress
Reading:
- Dickinson, “The President and Congress” in Nelson, 10th, pp. 406-447
- Cameron and Park, “A Primer on the President’s Legislative Program” in Rockman and Waterman, pp. 45-80
- Epstein, Kristensen, and O’Halloran, “Conditional Presidential Leadership: Pivotal Players, Gridlock and Delegation” in Rockman and Waterman, pp. 81-104

FIRST PAPER DUE OCT. 8

October 8 – The Appointments Process
Reading:
- Ellis and Nelson, pp. 246-264 (Yalof v. Maltese)

October 13 – Fall Break, No Class 😊

October 15 – The President and the Courts
Reading:
- Yalof, “The Presidency and the Judiciary” in Nelson, 10th, pp. 448-472
October 20, 22, 27 – The President and the Executive Branch
Staffing and Controlling the White House (EOP), the Administration, and the Permanent Government

Reading:
- Fine and Waterman, “A New Model of Presidential Leadership: Controlling the Bureaucracy” in Rockman and Waterman, pp. 19-44
- Burke, “The Institutional Presidency” in Nelson, 10th, pp. 349-373
- Ellis and Nelson, pp. 226-245 (Sollenberger and Rozell v. Vaughn and Villalobos); pp. 16-37 (Ellis v. Prakash)

Second Paper Handed Out Oct. 27

October 29 – No Class (Dept. Review)

November 3 – Presidents and Policy: Continuity and Change
Reading:
- Ellis and Nelson, pp. 185-205 (Wirls v. Tichenor)

Second Paper Due November 5

November 5 and 10 – Skills, Competencies, and Variability in Office
Reading:
- Quirk, “Presidential Competence” in Nelson, 10th, pp. 134-166
- Greenstein, “Understanding Presidential Personality” and Waterman Addendum, “Presidential Skill and Greatness” in Rockman and Waterman, pp. 261-276
- Rockman, “When It Comes to Presidential Leadership, Accentuate the Positive But Don’t Forget the Normative” in Rockman and Waterman, pp. 311-329
- Ellis and Nelson, pp. 94-116 (Skowronek v. Greenstein), pp. 117-142 (Dickinson v. Edwards)
November 12 and 17 – Presidential Unilateralism: Conditions, Constitutionality, Prerogatives, Risks, and the Unitary Executive

Reading:
- Howell, pp. 92-105
- Howell and Kriner, “Power Without Persuasion: Identifying Executive Influence” in Rockman and Waterman, pp. 105-144
- Ellis and Nelson, pp. 206-225 (Shane v. Lund); pp. 161-184 (Kassop v. Pious)

November 19 – Expectations and Reality

Reading:
- Howell, pp. 106-127

Final Paper Handed Out on November 19; Due Back on December 14

Nov. 26 & 28 – TG Week – Enjoy the Holiday 😊

December 3 & 5 – Looking in the Rearview Mirror: Retrospectives on Presidential Power

Reading:
- Howell, pp. 128-143
- Rockman and Waterman, “Two Normative Models of Presidential Leadership” in Rockman and Waterman, pp. 331-347