Political Science 532: The Presidency  
Summer 2010

Time: TBD  
Location: TBD  
Professor: Nathan J. Kelly, Ph.D.  
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Course Website: Available via Online@UT

Course Description

This is a graduate seminar in the presidency. The goal of the course is to expose you to the main lines of research on the American presidency, to give a basic foundation for your preparation for doctoral comprehensive exams, to provide sufficient exposure to the literature to develop your research interests in the presidency, and to provide you an opportunity to critically assess scholarly literature in this substantive area.

Required Books for Purchase

Please visit http://web.utk.edu/~nkelly/teaching/teaching.html to be sure that you are purchasing the correct books.


Assignments and Grading

1) Participation in Discussion (30%)

Given that this is a discussion-based class, students should come ready to engage in discussion every class session. All required readings should be completed prior to our class session. You should not just quickly read the assigned readings, but should think carefully and critically about each reading and be ready to describe its contribution to the literature and where it fits with other readings on similar subjects. You want to understand what the author is trying to say and do, and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the author’s theoretical framework, methodology, and substantive conclusions. If you do not do this, you will not be able to receive a top grade in the class. For the seminar to be a useful
learning experience you must come to class every session and be prepared to participate in discussions. You alone are responsible for taking an active role in shaping your intellectual development and your research agenda. Both energetic and thoughtful participation in graduate seminars is a necessary step in that process.

2) Leading Discussion Sessions (30%)

Each student will be responsible for leading discussion sessions on several occasions. When you are leading discussion, you need to have a more detailed than usual understanding of the readings. Your responsibility is to identify the important points of each reading and lead the rest of the class through a discussion that elicits thoughtful conversation about the readings. Take the other students on a journey through the reading that points them toward the key points of the readings. Push the students to connect readings and to see how different readings from each session fit together into a cohesive whole. Be ready to point out where disagreements between authors exist and help the other students to flesh out these disagreements. When you lead discussion, there will be a team of students assigned for each session. Your team should divide the readings for the session in order to identify an individual who will take primary responsibility for each reading. All members of the team, however, have a responsibility to guide the discussion in general.

3) Final Paper (40%)

Each student will be asked to submit a 15-20 page critical review essay that builds upon a line of research originating in the class readings and supplemented with the student's own bibliographic search. The idea is to demonstrate command of the terms of debate within a particular research community, frame an original research question that engages that community, and advance debate along some particular line of thought. Successful essays will accomplish several tasks: they will 1) characterize the structure and evolution of argumentation within a research area, 2) assess its theoretical, conceptual, and methodological contributions and limitations, 3) identify those aspects of the debate most ripe for scholarly advancement, 4) frame a research question that pushes that debate forward, and 5) map out a strategy of inquiry to guide researchers interested in further pursuing your line of thought. This paper will be due at a date to be announced.

Grades will be assigned at the discretion of the professor. Generally, A’s will be assigned only to students with excellent performance (typically above 94%). Students who meet expectations and perform well will typically receive a B+ (typically above 86%). Grades lower than B+ (below 86%) indicate performance below expectations. If you have questions about your grade through the semester, please feel free to discuss them with me, but the overall grade will be determined by the totality of your work.

Prerequisites

You must have successfully completed POLS 530: Core Seminar in American politics to take this course. No exceptions.
Schedule and Reading List

Session 1 – Introduction and Course Overview

- No reading assignment

Session 2 – Approaches to Studying the Presidency and Institutional Development


Session 3 – Presidential Elections and the Role of Public Opinion


Session 4 – Public Perceptions of the President

Session 5 – The President and the Media


Session 6 – Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion and Agenda Setting


Session 7 – Presidential Influence in the Legislative Process

**Session 8 – The President’s Use of Bargaining**


**Session 9 – Interactions with the Judiciary and Appointments**

Session 10 – The Use of Unilateral Power


Final Paper Due TBD