2016 will be one of the most unusual presidential elections in modern U.S. history because of the characteristics of the nominees and the perceived stakes. Those stakes recognize that the American presidency is the most powerful political office in the world, and the actions and ideas propagated by the American president have great potential for both good and bad effects on the nation and the world. This course takes a critical, analytical view of the powers, temptations, and constraints of the office, as well as the political processes around it.

We will consider explanations for the unusual outcomes of this year’s nomination process, and their reverberation with a wider international revolt against globalism evident this year. But we will also focus on long-term patterns of presidential behavior. The central task is to assess the performance of the 20-21st century presidency, focusing on its legal powers and institutional development, recruitment process (nominations and elections), personal psychology, relationship to social groups, economic forces, and place in "political time." We will examine the remarkable (though not unprecedented) expansion of presidential power in the G.W. Bush and Barack H. Obama administrations, with an eye toward similarities/continuities, and differences effected by changes in party control, personality, and circumstance.

There will be two short essays (c. 5 pp each) based on the syllabus readings (topic choices will be distributed). Each counts for 15% of the final grade. There will be an in-class midterm (30% of grade) and a final exam (40 percent). You are strongly urged to follow NYT or WP political coverage. Blackboard readings are indicated with an asterisk. There will also be interesting, optional (opt) items at the Blackboard site. Only readings listed on the syllabus are required.

Books used, in whole or part, in order of use (and available for purchase at the Campus Store):
2) Michael Genovese, Todd Belt, and William Lammers, The President and Domestic Policy, 2nd ed
3) Irving Janis, Groupthink (2nd ed)

Class handouts or Blackboard items NOT on the syllabus are strictly optional reading, fyi.

CRITIQUES, THEORIES, PERSPECTIVES

Wk 1       Aug 24-26
*James Pfiffner, “The Magna Carta and the Contemporary Presidency, 2015”
*Supplement this with the short ES powerpoint on presidential power
*Frances Fukuyama, “Political Decay and the American Election”

Wk 2       Aug 29-Sep 2
*Theodore Lowi, The Personal President, 97-117
Pika et al, “Presidential Character…” 170-76 (skim the rest of the chapter)
*Ron Suskind, “Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush,”
  New York Times Magazine, OCT. 17, 2004
*Stephen Skowronek, “Presidential Leadership in Political Time,” Nelson, 5th ed.; and
*“Politics of Leadership at the End of the 20th Century,” 83-116. (2 articles)
THE ELECTION SYSTEM, PARTIES, AND PUBLIC OPINION

Wk 3             *Pika et al, “Election Politics,” 38-90
Sep 7-9         *Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, John Zaller, The Party Decides, 277-303
*John Sides and Lynn Vavreck, The Gamble, 1-12, 222-42
*Campaign Finance Law (CRS 15)
*Sasha Issenberg, “Victory Lab,” two Slate articles on 2012 Election
*Framing II: Iraq war in the 2015-16 campaign: Jeb Bush, Peter Breitbart (2 arts)
*Trump and his Party: Why he got the nomination, why he still needs a party

Wk 4         *Daniel Galvin, Presidential Party Building, bottom p. 4-38
S 12-16    *McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, Polarized America (summary, chart)

*1st Short Essay on readings due Mon. Sept 19 (see note on papers, over, and on BB)

IDEOLOGY AND THE PRESIDENCY

Wk 5             *Thomas Langston, Ideologues and Presidents, ix-29
*W. Lance Bennett et al, When the Press Fails, 14-29, 48-57
**(Opt) Col. Gian Gentile, Wrong Turn, xiii-33, 137-41

INSTITUTIONAL and LEGAL POWERS AND CONFLICTS

Sep 26-30    *Pfiffner, Power Play, 194-228 (“The Power to Ignore the Law”)
Why are executive agencies incompetent? Why aren’t presidents good managers?

Wk 7                Finish Institutions Discussion      * MIDTERM in class on Friday Oct 7 *
Oct 3-7       Fall Break  Oct 8-11

PATTERNS IN POLICY: DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN

Wk 8         *Fred I. Greenstein, Inventing the Job of President, 1-top 5 (Opt) 63-83
*James Pfiffner, “Decision Making in the Obama White House”
THE PRESIDENT, INTEREST GROUPS, AND ELITE POWER NETWORKS

Wk 9     Oct 17-21  Wk 10     Oct 24-28  Wk 11     Oct 31-Jan. 4
*Eric Lipton and Kevin Sack, “Big Senate Gift to Drug Maker,” NYT, Jan 19, 2013  *Stephen Kinzer, Overthrow 1-6, 111-47
*Ron Kampeas, “AIPAC kicks off major lobbying push against Iran pact,” The Times of Israel, July 23, 2015  *Fredrik Logevall, Choosing War, 383-399
*3 Senators debate Iran Agreement Lugar/Bennett v. Schumer  *Iraq, Lie by Lie (Chronology of Iraq Decisions, Mother Jones, Sept-Oct ‘06
*2 Senators voice opposition to Trans-Pacific Partnership Trade Agreement (TPP)  (Opt) E. Sanders, “Presidents, War, and Coercive Diplomacy”

HOW AND WHY PRESIDENTS MAKE WAR, DOMESTIC AND INT’L CONSEQUENCES

Wk 11     Nov. 4  Wk 12     Nov 7-11  Wk 13     Nov 14-21  Wk 14     Nov 28- Dec.2
*Stephen Kinzer, Overthrow 1-6, 111-47  Second Short Essay Due Nov. 21
*Fredrik Logevall, Choosing War, 383-399 Thanksgiving Holiday Wed. Nov. 23-27
*Iraq, Lie by Lie (Chronology of Iraq Decisions, Mother Jones, Sept-Oct ‘06
*Opt) Jacobs and Page, “Representation of Social Sectors in U.S. Govt” (table)

Second Short Essay Due Nov. 21

Thanksgiving Holiday Wed. Nov. 23-27

*Notes on papers/exams: Read the writing pointers carefully before starting; they are very important and familiarity will be assumed. Topic choices and instructions will be posted on BB and also discussed in class. Be aware that if plagiarism questions arise, the paper will be run through Turnitin. If you turn in your paper outside of class, deliver it personally to me. Penalties for unexcused late papers accumulate by day; a late paper submission or missed exam must be discussed with me before the due date and delays are granted only for documented illness, family emergency, or other crisis.
If there is anything that is interfering with your performance in this course, please feel free to talk with me, in complete confidence. I generally do not check email more than once a day, usually in the evening, so if you are experiencing a crisis and need to speak with me, you may call me at home.