The American Presidency

Government 3161, Spring, 2013                                      Time & Place: T/TH 10:15-11:25 MG 165

Elizabeth Sanders (mes14) White Hall 314 (5-2305) Office Hours: TR 11:30-12:30 and
                                                      4:30-6:00 or by appt.

TA: Mallory SoRell White Hall B-11

The American presidency is the most powerful political office in the world, and the American
president has 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.
We will explore and seek explanations for 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 "political
time.” We will examine the remarkable (if not unprecedented) expansion of presidential power in
the G.W. Bush administration and trends in the first four years of the Obama presidency, with an
eye toward similarities/continuities, and differences effected by changes in party control,
personality, and circumstance. Particular attention will be paid to the role of ideology, to power
distinctions and incentives in domestic and foreign policy, and to worrisome expansions of
presidential power since 9-11.

There will be two short essays (c. 5 pp each) on the syllabus readings (topics 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 items
at the Blackboard site. Books used, in whole or part, in order of use (all on reserve at Uris and
available for purchase at the Campus Store are:

1) James P. Pfiiffner, Power Play (should be purchased, but first week’s reading is also on BB)
2) Thomas E. Cronin and Michael A. Genovese, The Paradox of the American Presidency 4th ed
3) William Lammers and Michael Genovese, The President and Domestic Policy
4) Irving Janis, Groupthink (2nd ed.) (Used copies at Amazon, if campus store runs out)

Any class handouts or Blackboard items NOT on the syllabus are strictly optional reading, fyi.
You are not required to read or use them in any way. Another optional resource of interest is the
Miller Center (VA) presidents website at: http://millercenter.org/academic/americanpresident.
Interesting foreign policy materials can be found at: http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv and
http://www.fas.org/blog/secrecy/.

PRESIDENTIAL BEHAVIOR: CRITIQUES, THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

Jan. 22- 24  *Andrew Rudalevige, The New Imperial Presidency, 1-17
            *Gene Healy, The Cult of the Presidency, 1-33
            * Ryan Lizza, “The Obama Memos,” New Yorker, Jan. 30, 2012 ( James Pfiiffner, Power Play, 1-12, 67-83; and *update re Obama (1-5).

            *Theodore Lowi, The Personal President, 97-117
Presidency and the Political System, 9th ed., 142-55, 160-63
THE ELECTION SYSTEM, PARTIES, AND PUBLIC OPINION

Feb 5-7      Cronin and Genovese, ch. 3
*Campaign Finance Law (Info from CFI and Center for Respons. Pols)
*Kathleen Hall Jamieson, ed. Electing the President 2008, 4-12, 34-49
*Sasha Issenberg, “Victory Lab,” two Slate articles on 2012 Election
*Seat Loss in Midterm Elections: History, Expectations
*OPT: Jane Mayer, “Covert Operations: The billionaire brothers who are waging a war against Obama,” New Yorker, August 30, 2010

Feb. 12-14  *Daniel Galvin, Presidential Party Building, bottom p. 4-8, 10-38
*McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, Polarized America (summary, chart)

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

IDEOLOGY AND THE PRESIDENCY

Feb. 19-21  *Thomas Langston, Ideologues and Presidents, xi-xxi, 1-21
*Jim Rutenberg, “Hawks on Iraq Prepare for War Again, Against Hagel”
*W. Lance Bennett et al, When the Press Fails, 14-29, 48-57

INSTITUTIONAL and LEGAL POWERS AND CONFLICTS

Feb. 26-28    Cronin and Genovese, ch. 5, 122-mid-132, 137-40; chs. 7, 6, and 9 (in that order)
Pfiffner, Power Play,194-228 (“The Power to Ignore the Law”)
OPT  *Tim Dickinson, “The Spill, The Scandal, and the President,” Rolling Stone [Why are executive agencies so poorly managed?]  

March 5-7  Discussion and Midterm Exam   **MIDTERM in class Thurs. March 7  **

PATTERNS IN POLICY: DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN

Mar. 12-14  *Fred I. Greenstein, Inventing the Job of President, 1-top 5 (OPT 63-83)
*H. W. Brands, Traitor to his Class (FDR), 330-42, 352-55, 560-67, 818-20
*James Pfiffner, “Decision Making in the Obama White House”

Spring Break March 16-24

THE PRESIDENT AND ELITE POWER NETWORKS
Mar. 26--28  *William F. Grover, The President as Prisoner, 1-13, 63-87
 *Thomas, R. Dye, Who’s Running America? 1-5, 10-11, 55-60, 67-71, 78-81
 *Janine Wedel, The Shadow Elite, 1-22, 147-92
 * (Opt) Business contests new financial regulations (Reuters interview, Jan. 2013)

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

Apr. 2-4  *Andrew J. Polsky, “The Presidency at War,” in Michael Nelson, ed. The
Presidency in American Politics 557-73
 - Pfiffner, Power Play, 33-55, 67-82, 84-167
 *Sarah Kreps and John Kaag, “The Use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles in
Contemporary Conflict: Legal and Ethical Analysis,” Polity, 2012
 *Dana Priest and William Arkin, “Top Secret America” (WP 7-17, 2010, 1-16)

Apr. 9-11  *Alexander DeConde, Presidential Machismo, 3-14, 285-95
 *Stephen Kinzer, Overthrow 1-6, 111-47
 *Fredrik Logevall, Choosing War, 383-399

Second Short Essay Due April 23 in class

Apr. 16-18  Janis, Groupthink, 2nd ed., 1-13, 42-71, 97-158

Apr.23-25  Janis, Groupthink, 174-87, 242-71

Apr. 30-May 2  Discussion, Review for Final

*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 or
Mallory. 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 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.