

The American Presidency  
Dr. Harry Dinella  
Schar School of Policy and Government  
George Mason University  
24 January - 2 May 2017

Tuesday: 7:00 PM - 9:40 PM  
Stonebridge High School  
Room 403

I am available for appointments. Talk to me during a class break or send me an email and we can arrange a mutually convenient time to meet. My home phone number is (703) 455 1924. The email you should contact me on is [hdinella@aol.com](mailto:hdinella@aol.com) and I look at it every day. I am usually up until midnight so do not hesitate to call me late.

Course Description: This graduate-level course is designed to prepare students (all of them already certified and experienced Loudoun County high school teachers) to teach an undergraduate-level class on the American Presidency to high school students.

This course will examine the American presidency and the strategies and institutional mechanisms that American presidents have used throughout history to lead the nation. We will focus on the historical development of the American presidency and modern executive power. Moreover, we will address the modern two-party system and the visions espoused by a number of key American presidents that propelled them to victory over their opponents. The keys to the general success that American presidents have enjoyed in the last two centuries are many. One of the most important keys to success has been the Constitution that George Washington himself helped deliver to the American people. Another is the plain fact that no nation in history has ever been endowed with a land mass that includes the vast agricultural lands, rivers, and mineral assets of the United States. The final key to success for American presidents has been the determination, resilience, and hard work of the American people themselves. This was never so aptly demonstrated as during World War II when America, starting from virtually scratch, fought and defeated the two greatest military powers of the era in less time than it takes to earn a bachelor of arts degree. Therefore, for the last 150 or so years, beginning with Lincoln, successive American presidents have had the good fortune of leading the most powerful nation in the world. But despite these many advantages, presidential leadership or sometimes the lack of it is the biggest advantage or disadvantage in terms of American success or failure domestically and abroad. We will examine the American presidency from George Washington to Donald Trump.

**Textbook and other readings:**

Sidney Milkis and Michael Nelson. *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776-2014*. Edition 7.

## **Readings continued.**

During the term we will also read a number of scholarly articles on the presidency (usually one each week) for class discussion. For the most part, the students will be asked to research and determine what articles these will be subject to instructor approval.

Other reading include newspapers. Students are expected to be current in terms of the presidency and in terms of the major issues the president wishes to or is compelled to deal with. I recommend that students regularly read one so-called "liberal" paper (*The Washington Post* or the *New York Times*) as well as one so-called "conservative" paper like the *Washington Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*, regularly. We will discuss the current presidency and relate it to past and present events on an almost weekly basis.

**Honor Code:** GMU has one. You are responsible for knowing it. Read your student handbook or look it up and read it on the GMU web site. Violations of the honor code can involve stiff penalties. Well, you all remember what happened to William Wallace in the last five minutes of the movie "*Braveheart*." Essentially, do your own work and do not plagiarize.

## **How you will be graded:**

There are no written tests, no midterm or final exams. Thirty-five percent of your grade will be determined from participation in class. "Participation" includes you coming to class, participating in class discussion (we will begin each class with a discussion of the presidency and current events), and individual presentations (usually 10-15 minutes) by each student at least one time during the term from scholarly articles. Therefore, each student (once during the term) will make a short presentation and lead a short discussion on a scholarly article he or she has chosen. Twenty (20%) percent of your "participation" grade will be based on weekly attendance and class participation. Fifteen (15%) percent of the participation grade will be based on your short class presentation and discussion of the scholarly article you choose pertaining to the presidency.

Sixty-five (65%) percent of your grade will be determined from a seminar paper each student will be required to complete prior to the end of the term on a subject regarding the presidency that is mutually agreed upon by the instructor and student. More details on the paper requirement will be discussed in class.

## **Grading Scale:**

A+ (96-100) A (94-95) A - (90-93) B+ (86-88) B (82-85) B- (80-81). This is a graduate course. You are expected to achieve no less than a "B" grade and anything less than that, beginning with a "B-" grade, is not satisfactory graduate work. I do not expect any student in a class of this type with students of the caliber that this class contains to achieve anything less than an A - grade. And if I perceive any of my students somehow headed in a direction that suggests that you may get less than an A - grade, well, you will know about it from me in time to make a (no pun intended) course correction.

Lectures, Assignments and Examinations:

24 January: Class orientation and introduction to the course.

31 January: The Constitutional Convention and Creating the Presidency. Assignment due: Read chapters 1 and 2, text and appropriate newspaper articles.

7 February: The Early Presidents, Washington and Adams. Assignment due: Read chapter 3, appropriate newspaper articles. Individual student presentation.

14 February: Jefferson. Assignment due: Read chapter 4, appropriate newspaper articles. Individual student presentation.

21 February: The Age of Jackson. Read chapter 5, appropriate newspaper articles. Individual student presentation. Submit a one page outline of the paper you intend to do. Include your topic, thesis, research ideas, and why you believe you have chosen a good topic.

28 February: Lincoln. Read chapter 6, appropriate newspaper articles. Individual student presentation.

7 March: Presidential power and the reactions to it: Johnson to Mckinley. Read chapter 7. Individual student presentation (maybe two presentations today). Newspaper articles.

14 March: TR, Taft, and Wilson. Read chapter 8. Newspaper articles and individual student presentation.

21 March: Harding, Coolidge, Hoover and the 20th Amendment. Read chapter 9. Newspaper articles and individual student presentation.

28 March: The Modern Presidency: FDR to Ike. Read chapter 10. Newspaper articles and student presentation.

4 April: JFK to Jimmy Carter. Read chapter 11. Newspaper articles and student presentation.

11 April: Spring Break.

18 April: Ronald Reagan and George H.W. ("41") Bush. Read chapter 12. Newspaper articles and student presentation (maybe two presentations).

25 April: William ("Bill") Clinton and the Modern Presidency and George W. ("43") Bush. Read chapters 13 and 14. Newspaper articles and student presentation. Newspaper articles and student presentation.

2 May: Barack Obama. Read chapter 15. Newspaper articles. Student presentation. **Seminar paper is due today.**

Have a great summer and good luck teaching the American Presidency!