

# **POL 314-01: THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY**

Washington & Jefferson College  
Spring 2024  
Tuesdays & Thursdays 12:50 – 2:35 PM  
Old Main 203

*Instructor:* Joel B. Kersting, Ph.D. (Pronouns: he/him/his)

*Email:* [jkersting@washjeff.edu](mailto:jkersting@washjeff.edu)

*Phone:* 724-503-1001 x 6182

*Office:* Old Main 209A

*Office Hours:* Tuesdays & Thursdays 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM; or by appointment

## **CATALOG DESCRIPTION**

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An analysis of the constitutional and political posture of the chief executive within the American political system, this course gives special consideration to the nature and scope of executive power and to decision-making in the White House. Discussions and lectures will focus on topics such as presidential election, accountability, personality, and the comparative analysis of selected presidents.

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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When both Americans and people from around the world think about American politics, they often first think about whoever the president is. But the American presidency is much more than just the person occupying the Oval Office. This course will introduce you to the presidency as a political institution, rather than serve as just an analysis of individual presidents.

In the beginning of the course, we will examine the constitutional foundations for the presidency and trace the evolution of the presidency from a limited to maximal institution. We will also analyze how presidents are selected by both political parties and the electorate.

In the second half of the course, we will consider the ways in which the presidency interacts with other national political institutions: Congress, the bureaucracy, and the judiciary. Additionally, we will look at the unilateral powers the presidency possesses, with a focus on the difference between domestic and foreign policy powers.

Beyond the substantive knowledge of the American presidency provided in this course, you will be provided with ample opportunity to engage with scholarly research, both by reading, discussing, and conducting your own qualitative case study research.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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After taking this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe the constitutional design and purpose of the presidency.
2. Explain the development of the modern institutional presidency.
3. Describe the course of presidential primary and general elections.
4. Explain how the presidency interacts with other institutions in American national politics.
5. Perform qualitative case study research and evaluate historical primary documents.
6. Participate in rigorous academic discussions.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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**Exams:** There are two *non-cumulative* exams in this course. These exams will consist of a combination of short answers and essay questions. A review sheet for each exam will be made available at least one week before the date of the exam. If you happen to be absent from class on one of the exam days and provided it is an excusable absence (See Attendance policy below), we can schedule a makeup exam. If you anticipate being absent for one of the exams, please let me know as soon as possible. (30%; 15% each)

**Research Paper Project:** The majority of your grade in this course will be based on a semester-long research project which culminates in a 10-12 page paper and an in-class presentation. You will formulate an original research question on some aspect of the modern institutional presidency; and then choose two qualitative case studies of different presidential administrations to help you answer your question. Additionally, you will review scholarly literature on your research question. There will be three smaller assignments throughout the semester designed to demonstrate your progress on this project. More information about these assignments and the broader research project will be distributed at the beginning of the semester. The due dates for each component of this project are as follows:

1. Research Proposal: February 16 (2.5%)
2. Case Selection: March 13 (2.5%)
3. Literature Review: March 29 (10%)
4. Primary Document Analysis: April 15 (5%)
5. Final Draft: May 7 (20%)
6. Presentations: May 11 [and May 7 if needed] (10%)

**Attendance:** You are expected to be present for every class meeting. My expectations for your intellectual growth in this course are high. When you are not present, you are unable to partake in that growth. **Everyone receives two free excused absences.** You do not need to notify me of these absences in advance. Do not abuse these excused absences. Students unable to attend class because of illness should contact Student Health Services. Students unable to attend class because of a family or other emergency should contact the Office of Student Life. If there is a reason for an ongoing absence in this class, please discuss this with me as soon as possible. (5%)

**Participation:** You will be expected to fully participate in class discussion. Actively engaging with the course material through discussion with fellow students is crucial to your understanding of the material. As a rule of thumb, you should be speaking, on average, at least once per class to receive a B for participation.

Speaking more than this will ensure a higher grade. Conversely, if you habitually fail to contribute to class discussion, you can expect your participation grade to decrease. While participation grades will be primarily based on contributing to in-person class discussions, there will also be the opportunity to gain participation credit through occasional small non-verbal assignments. (15%)

### Grade Determination:

Component	Worth
Exam 1	15%
Exam 2	15%
Research Proposal	2.5%
Case Selection	2.5%
Literature Review	10%
Primary Document Analysis	5%
Research Paper Final Draft	20%
Research Paper Presentation	10%
Attendance	5%
Participation	15%

At the end of the course, your grade will be assigned based on the following scale: A (93-100); A- (90-92); B+ (87-89); B (83-86); B- (80-82); C+ (77-79); C (73-76); C- (70-72); D (60-69); and F (0-59).

## COURSE POLICIES

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**Late Assignment Policy:** You are expected to submit all assignments by the due dates listed on the syllabus. Late assignments can be submitted after the due date with a grade penalty. The final grade for the assignment will be lowered by a third of a letter grade for every 24 hours the assignment is late. **Assignments submitted more than a week after the due date will not be accepted for credit.**

Extensions on assignments can be granted providing two criteria are met: (1) there is a legitimate excuse for the assignment not being submitted on time (e.g. documented illness or personal emergency); and (2) you request the extension before the assignment is due.

**Classroom Culture:** For this course to be fully successful, I expect two things from each student. First, I expect active engagement in classroom discussion. While much time will be devoted to class lectures on the material, there will always be time devoted each class for group discussion on the topics we have discussed that day. Relatedly, I expect you to have completed the readings and to be prepared to discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of the arguments presented in the texts. Our discussions will draw from those theoretical debates. Participation accounts for 15% of your total grade, so it is in your best interest to come prepared for class. A firm grasp of the literature will serve you well in preparation for exams in this class and in crafting a firm foundation for further classes in political science.

While preparing to discuss the course material, I suggest you read (or at least scan) a newspaper once a day. Since this is a class on politics, it is especially important to keep up on current events since they are often direct results of the political system we will be examining. W&J has an online subscription to the New York

Times, the Washington Post, and the Wall Street Journal. Information for accessing these newspapers can be found in the following links: [NYT](#), [WaPo](#), and [WSJ](#).

We will occasionally discuss issues that are controversial or polarizing. This is an intrinsic part of the political process, and, as such, it will certainly be a part of our discussions. While it is by no means wrong to hold an opinion on controversial issues, I expect and require civility in discussions. Hateful comments will not be tolerated and will be grounds for dismissal from the class session.

A key part of academic discussion is treating your classmates and the instructor with respect. Respect not only pertains to what you are contributing to class discussion, but also how you listen to what your classmates and the instructor are saying. I expect you to be an active listener during class discussions.

**Technology:** In my experience as an instructor, I have found that while some students may benefit from using technology in the classroom, there are also many students who abuse the privilege of technology use. **Laptop and tablet use for class purposes is permitted in this course, but this is a privilege. If I habitually observe students abusing this privilege, I reserve the right to prohibit all technology use.** Relatedly, cell phone use is prohibited in this course. If I observe you using your phone during a class, you will receive no participation credit for that day.

**Contacting the Instructor:** The best way to get in contact with me is through email ([jkersting@washjeff.edu](mailto:jkersting@washjeff.edu)). I do my best to reply to all student emails within 24 hours and typically my replies will be much sooner than that. That being said: do not email me at midnight and expect a timely answer.

If your questions or concerns are substantial in nature, it is best to meet with me in person rather than engage in a lengthy email exchange. I have regular office hours listed above, but if those times do not work for you, please feel free to schedule an appointment with me.

**Mental Health and Wellness:** W&J faculty and staff recognize that mental or physical health concerns can affect any of us, and sometimes make it difficult for students to manage their academics or daily life. **If you find yourself struggling this semester, please let me know. I am one of many people here at W&J who care about you and your welfare.**

Please also consider contacting the Student Health & Counseling Center 724-223-6107 or the 24/7/365 Counseling Support Line 833-434-1217, for support if you're feeling stressed, overwhelmed, anxious, depressed, lost, or are struggling with personal issues. Services are free and confidential.

Students have access to free, confidential in-the-moment counseling, self-help, and meditation programs including the prepaid version of Headspace, and online therapy options via 833-434-1217 or the CampusWell app that you can download to your phone.

**Disability Support Services:** Washington & Jefferson College is committed to providing academic accommodations for students with disabilities. This includes individuals with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, and mental health disorders that meet the definition of a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students who plan to request accommodations should contact the Director for Academic Success as early as possible, although requests may be made at any time. To determine whether you qualify for accommodations, or if you have questions about services and procedures, please call 724-223-6008 or send an email to [dss@washjeff.edu](mailto:dss@washjeff.edu).

**Academic Honesty:** Washington & Jefferson College is a community dedicated to the intellectual and personal development of its students. Such development may be achieved in many ways, including creating original works of writing, art, and music; conducting research; engaging in discussions; taking examinations; and participation in co-curricular activities. Central to such developmental activities is that whatever a student represents as being the fruit of his or her own intellectual labor is indeed his or her own. Otherwise, the student will not only have acted dishonestly, but will also have wasted the developmental opportunities afforded by the College. W&J upholds academic honesty in the College community by pursuing cases of academic misconduct. When such academic misconduct is discovered, the College will ensure through the imposition of appropriate penalties that the student does not gain unfair advantage through his or her dishonesty and will help the student address the concerns that led to the offense. If the nature of the intellectual dishonesty is determined to be conscious, calculated and/or intentional, or if academic misconduct recurs, the student may be judged to be incapable of benefiting to a satisfactory degree from the developmental opportunities afforded by the College, and may then be permanently dismissed so that the College's resources may be directed to deserving students.

**AI/LLM Use Policy:** In an academic context, plagiarism is the act of presenting someone else's work as one's own. Presenting the output of an automated tool (artificial intelligence or machine learning tools such as ChatGPT or Dall-E 2) as one's own work is misrepresentation of the work of the engineers and scientists who developed the tool and of the creators and owners of the significant body of data (text, images, etc.) upon which the model was trained. **Students are not allowed to use advanced automated tools on assignments in this course. Each student is expected to complete each assignment without substantive assistance from others, including automated tools.** Use of these tools to complete coursework will result in grade penalties and an academic integrity violation.

## TEXTBOOK AND READINGS

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The required text for this course is **The American Presidency: An Institutional Approach to Executive Politics** (ISBN: 978-0691225579) by William G. Howell. It is available through the W&J bookstore and online. All other course readings will be posted online for your use. Readings are to be completed BEFORE the class meeting for which they are listed.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

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*(Subject to change)*

Meeting	Topic	Readings and Assignments
Thurs. Jan. 25	Course Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Syllabus</li> </ul>
Tues. Jan. 30	Studying the Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Introduction</li> </ul>
Thurs. Feb. 1	Creating the Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 1 pp. 26-40</li> </ul>

Tues. Feb. 6	Why Have a President?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pavlus (2012): “Why are Presidents Less Effective than Prime Ministers?”</li> </ul>
Thurs. Feb. 8	Theories of the Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 1 pp. 43-51</li> <li>• Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Appendix B pp. 574-576</li> </ul>
Tues. Feb. 13	The Traditional Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 2 pp. 56-66</li> </ul>
Thurs. Feb. 15	The Dawn of the Modern Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 2 pp. 66-81</li> </ul> <p><b>Research Question due Feb. 16 by midnight</b></p>
Tues. Feb. 20	The Modern Institutional Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 3</li> </ul>
Thurs. Feb. 22	Power and the Institutional Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 4</li> </ul>
Tues. Feb. 27	Exam 1 Review	
Thurs. Feb. 29	Exam 1	
Tues. Mar. 5	The Presidential Candidate Nominating Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 5 pp. 135-149</li> </ul>
Thurs. Mar. 7	Evaluating Presidential Primaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 5 pp. 150-158</li> <li>• Article on 2024 GOP primary TBA</li> </ul> <p><b>Case Selection due Friday March 13 by midnight</b></p>
Tues. Mar. 12	The Contours of Presidential Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 6 pp. 175-193</li> </ul>
Thurs. Mar. 14	Presidential Campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 6 pp. 193-212</li> </ul>
Tues. Mar. 19	<b>NO CLASS – Spring Break</b>	
Thurs. Mar. 21	<b>NO CLASS – Spring Break</b>	
Tues. Mar. 26	Relations with Congress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 8 pp. 249-277</li> </ul>

Thurs. Mar. 28	Conflicts with Congress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 8 pp. 277-293</li> </ul> <b>Lit Review due Friday March 29 by midnight</b>
Tues. Apr. 2	Unilateral Powers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 9 pp. 300-317</li> </ul>
Thurs. Apr. 4	Domestic vs. Foreign Powers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wildavsky (1966): "The Two Presidencies"</li> </ul>
Tues. Apr. 9	Checking Presidential Powers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 9 pp. 317-341</li> </ul>
Thurs. Apr. 11	Paper Workshop Day	<b>Primary Document Analysis due Monday April 15 by midnight</b>
Tues. Apr. 16	Exam 2 Review	
Thurs. Apr. 18	Exam 2	
Tues. Apr. 23	The Presidency and the Bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 10 pp. 347-363</li> <li>Moynihan (2023): "The Risks of Schedule F"</li> </ul>
Thurs. Apr. 25	The Presidency and the Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 11 pp. 385-396; 402-410</li> </ul>
Tues. Apr. 30	The Presidency and the Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Howell: <i>The American Presidency</i> Ch. 13</li> </ul>
Thurs. May 2	Reforming the Presidency	
Tues. May 7	TBA	<b>Final Paper due</b>
Sat. May 11	Presentations	<b>Exam Time: 2:00 – 5:00 PM</b>