

**POL 2100 - 261: The American Presidency** (Fall 2025, 3 Credits)

**Meeting Times:** Mondays and Wednesdays, 6:45 – 8:00PM, Glueck G519

**Instructors:** Prof. Matthew Incantalupo ([matthew.incantalupo@yu.edu](mailto:matthew.incantalupo@yu.edu))  
Prof. Tevi Troy ([tevi.troy@yu.edu](mailto:tevi.troy@yu.edu))

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays, 1:00PM – 3:00PM or by email appointment, Furst/Belz 413D

**Important Dates:**

Presidential Success Assignment	Nov. 11 (Tuesday)
State of the Union Assignment	Dec. 1
Presidential Briefing Assignment	Dec. 17-24
Final Exam	TBA

**Course Overview:** The U.S. president is commonly referred to as the most powerful person in the world and there's some truth to that. But the president governs in a system of deliberately separated and shared powers. The checks that are imposed on presidents are serious and frequently prevent them from getting what they want. And yet, some presidents clearly succeed more than others. What explains this variation? Why do some presidents succeed while others fail? In this course, we will examine the process by which a president is nominated and elected, and explore theories that explain presidential power and success. We will also learn about what *really* goes on inside the White House and how presidents demonstrate their leadership styles and capacities.

In particular, we will consider presidents' influence in policymaking by examining their relationships with other political institutions, the public, business leaders, and foreign actors. Together, we will develop an understanding about the office of the presidency that can be applied across administrations, based on political science concepts, and firsthand experience working in a presidential administration.

**Goals:**

- Understand the presidency as a political institution operating in the broader U.S. political system and its development over time
- Learn about the individuals who have held the office of the President and how their individual managerial styles shaped the institution and their success
- Learn theories of presidential success and apply them to a variety of case studies
- Receive a firsthand account of the inner workings of presidential administrations from a Senior White House Aide
- Learn how social scientists ask and answer interesting questions about politics
- Hone critical thinking, reading, and writing skills

**Procedures:** This is a team-taught class. In general, Prof. Incantalupo will introduce topics on Wednesday, and Prof. Troy will deepen our understanding of those topics on Mondays. We will conduct in-class activities as well.

All readings (articles, book chapters, etc.) will be posted or linked to through Canvas. Please see the full schedule of assigned readings and assignments attached to this syllabus. We will make the readings available well in advance. In order to properly manage your workload, we can't assign or cover as much as we would like (or as much as this course truly requires). You can also feel free to send us an email if you'd like to know more about a particular topic. We may add or swap out some readings over the course of the semester, but will make sure to notify you of any changes. The best

way to stay on top of your work in this course is to visit its Canvas page frequently and attend all of our meetings, where we will discuss material that goes beyond the required readings.

We will not take attendance and your grade in the course is not based on your participation. You should still attend and participate as much as possible, because we believe it will facilitate your learning. You should not tell us if you are unable to attend one or more of our course meetings. If you are facing **any** circumstances that are affecting your performance in the class or are getting in the way of you learning, please reach out to us as soon as possible and we will try to help you every way that I can. We sincerely believe that if we all try our best, remain understanding of each other, and are willing to be flexible, we can have an incredible learning experience.

**Grading:**

<i>Defense of a Presidential Decision Presentation</i>	10%
<i>Presidential Success Paper</i>	20%
<i>State of the Union Assignment</i>	25%
<i>Presidential Briefing Simulation</i>	20%
<i>Final Exam</i>	25%

We calculate weighted grades and use [this table](#) to convert numerical grades into letter grades. We do not offer individual opportunities for extra credit. If you feel like you have received a grade in error, whether on an assignment or for the course, submit your case for a grade change via email and we will look into it. Please be aware that grade change requests could result in your grade increasing *or* decreasing.

*Discussion board:* We will create a discussion board on Canvas for you to ask us any questions you have about the course or the material, which includes questions you have from the readings, the lectures, or anything that comes up that's substantively related. Please do not be shy about asking questions. It may be uncomfortable to admit to being confused or having a gap in your understanding in a (semi) public forum, but it will really improve our collective understanding of the material. If you email us to ask a question that is better suited for the discussion board, we will ask you to post it there so we can give our answer to the class. We want you to think of posting on this board as equivalent to raising your hand in class to ask a question, just available to you outside of class. We will monitor this board very closely and will respond to posts frequently.

We'll be tackling hard questions on social problems and political debates about which many intelligent people reasonably disagree. We can't encourage you enough to contribute to our discussions; your reactions to the readings will provide all of us with new insights. It's also paramount that you respect the viewpoints and contributions of your peers in class, as everyone will benefit from an environment in which diverse viewpoints are shared. Neither discussion board can be used to solicit help on any individual assignments, such as papers, exams, or quizzes, beyond clarifying questions, which should be posted on the board that contains questions for your professor.

*Assignments:* You will complete four assignments that will be a mixture of papers and presentations. Details for each of these will follow. Many of the Monday classes led by Professor Troy will have an interactive component, as students will have to defend an aspect of the presidency from the perspective of a president giving a press conference to a hostile press. Students will also have to write a press release touting a significant presidential accomplishment, as well as produce an infographic highlighting a particular President.

Any written work you turn in must also have proper in-text citations with a separate bibliography section. You can use any citation style you would like, as long as it is an in-text, parenthetical style (no footnotes or endnotes). We will distribute a citation guide as well as general writing tips via Canvas. Please upload your paper on Canvas as a Microsoft Word document so we can provide comments directly on it and handle everything digitally. Do not submit your assignments as Pages files, PDFs, Google Docs, or anything that is not a Microsoft Word document.

*Final Examination:* The final exam will be held during finals week. The exam format is not set in stone, but will likely consist of questions that can be answered in a few hours' time. Exams are open-book; you are welcome to use your class notes, reading notes, and course texts, and any lecture materials while you write your exam; however, you may not consult anyone else for help on the exam (this includes editing and proofreading). You may not discuss the exams with anyone, whether they are a member of this course or not (except for us), until the exam has ended for everyone.

**Academic Honesty and Disability Accommodation:** As members of the Yeshiva University community, we expect that you will always engage in academic honesty. Under no circumstances may you solicit, accept, or give disallowed help on an exam. All ideas, language, and research that are not originally yours should be cited in any piece of writing you submit during this course. This includes any drafts or early works as well as your final versions of papers. When you directly quote someone else's words, use quotation marks around the entire selection. When you borrow or reference someone else's ideas, be sure to cite the author(s) properly. Please be aware that there is no such thing as "accidental plagiarism."

We will distribute a separate Artificial Intelligence policy for each assignment. Please follow these instructions carefully.

You have a responsibility to make sure that everything you turn in is either original or properly attributed. In order to assist you with this, we will circulate a citation guide with helpful tips early in the semester. Students caught cheating in any way (which includes plagiarizing) will be reported to the appropriate administrators by the instructor. If you have any questions about Academic Honesty or my expectations, please speak with me.

Students who will be requesting disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, [akelsen@yu.edu](mailto:akelsen@yu.edu), (646) 592-4280, during the first week of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please contact me to ensure the successful implementation of those accommodations. Students must provide documentation from the Office of Student Affairs in order to receive special accommodations.

The Wilf Campus Writing Center offers individualized tutoring that can support your writing for this course. I highly recommend that you make use of the Writing Center for your reading connection papers. All writers need feedback, even strong ones. Find out more and make an appointment at [www.yu.edu/wilf/writingcenter](http://www.yu.edu/wilf/writingcenter).

**Office Hours and Communication:** Prof. Incantalupo's office hours are on Tuesdays from 3:00PM – 5:00PM or by appointment via email ([matthew.incantalupo@yu.edu](mailto:matthew.incantalupo@yu.edu)). Professor Troy is most likely to be on campus Monday afternoons. Please reach out to set an appointment at [tevitroy@gmail.com](mailto:tevitroy@gmail.com) or 202-203-9644. The best way to get in touch with your instructors about anything related to the course is through email.



## Course Schedule:

*Our course is made up of 10 topical modules and a simulation activity. Each module will include readings (or other materials to be consumed on your own), and lectures, with some additional activities occasionally. You should try go through the items on the syllabus in the order they're listed. Plan your time accordingly and be highly aware of any posted due dates.*

### Module 0: Meet your Instructors// Course Introduction (Aug. 25 + 27)

- Read
  - Course Syllabus

### Module 1: Constitutional Foundations of the Presidency// How Washington Defined the Presidency (Sep. 3 + 8)

- Read
  - Federalist Papers 69, 70, and 51
  - Howell, William G. and Terry M. Moe. *Relic: How Our Constitution Undermines Effective Government and Why We Need a More Powerful Presidency*. New York: Basic Books Chapter 4.

### Module 2: Presidential Elections// Who Decides to Run for President? (Sep. 10 + 15)

- Read
  - Cohen, Marty, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. 2008. *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Chapter 7.

### Module 3: Presidential Leadership and Success// What Makes for Presidential Success (and Failure)? (Sep. 17, 29, and October 20. Note: remote instruction on Sep. 29)

- Read
  - Greenstein, Fred. 1994. *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press. Chapter 3.
  - Neustadt, Richard. 1991. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: Free Press. Chapters 1-3.
  - Skowronek, Stephen. 1986. "The Presidency in the Political Order," in *Understanding the Presidency*, eds James P. Pfiffner and Roger H. Davidson (2013). New York: Pearson Education.
  - Kenneth Mayer. 2001. *With the Stroke of a Pen: Executive Orders and Presidential Power*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Read pages 1-54.

### Module 4: Public Opinion and the President// Presidential Approval in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Oct. 22 + 27)

- Read
  - Gronke, Paul and Brian Newman. 2009. "Public Evaluations of Presidents," in the *Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency*, eds George C. Edwards III and William G. Howell. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 232 – 243.

### Module 5: Presidential Appeals and Responsiveness// Presidents' Use of Culture to Connect with Americans (Oct. 29 + Nov. 3)

- Read



- Wood, B. Dan. 2009. *The Myth of Presidential Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2.
- Canes-Wrone, Brandice. 2005. *Who Leads Whom?: Presidents, Policy, and the Public*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. pp. 1 – 6.

**Module 6: The President and Congress// When Do Presidents Exercise Their First Vetoes? (Nov. 5 + 10)**

- Read
  - Cameron, Charles. 2000. *Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Power of Negative Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 7.
  - Cohen, Jeffrey E. 2012. *The President's Legislative Policy Agenda, 1789 – 2002*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 3 and 4 (pp. 64 – 139).

**Presidential Success Assignment Due Tuesday, Nov. 11 at 11:59PM**

**Module 7: The President and the Bureaucracy// How Presidents Manage and Control Their Cabinets (Nov. 12 + 17)**

- Read
  - Lewis, David E. 2008. *The Politics of Presidential Appointments: Political Control and Bureaucratic Performance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 3.

**Module 8: The President and the Courts// An Analysis of Key Nominations (Nov. 19 + 24)**

- Read
  - Cameron, Charles and Jee-Kwang Park. 2011. "Going Public When Opinion is Contested: Evidence from Presidents' Campaigns for Supreme Court Nominees, 1930 – 2009." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 41(3): 442 – 470.

**No Meeting on Nov. 26// State of the Union Assignment (Dec. 1)**

**Module 9: The Unitary Executive// "A Pen and a Phone" in Retrospect: Can Presidents Recognize Separation of Powers Again? (Dec. 3 + 8)**

- Read
  - Howell, William G. 2005. "Introduction: Unilateral Powers: An Overview." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35(3): 417 – 439.
  - Bolton, Alexander and Sharece Thrower. 2016. "Legislative Capacity and Executive Unilateralism." *The American Journal of Political Science* 60(3): 649 – 663.
  - <https://nypost.com/2024/01/12/opinion/10-years-later-obamas-phone-and-pen-shtick-is-becoming-a-dangerous-white-house-habit/>

**Module 10: Foreign Policy and Wartime// Crisis and Disaster Response (Dec. 10 + 15)**

- Read
  - Wildavsky, Aaron. 1966 "The Two Presidencies." *Transaction* 4 (December): 7 – 14
  - Pfiffner. "Constraining Executive Power: George W. Bush and the Constitution" in *Understanding the Presidency*

**Presidential Briefing Simulation (Dec. 17, 22 + 24)**

**Final Exam: TBA**