

The Biden-Harris Presidency: Understanding Executive Power in Historical and Contemporary Context

UCDC Spring 2022 Quarter
Thursdays 3:00-6:00pm ET, UCDC Room 318

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Office hours: Zoom by appointment

Our Class During Pandemic and Crisis

Two years ago, none of us would have imagined what the world looks like today. Everyone is dealing with some kind of change from “normal,” and there’s a disproportionate burden placed on some more than others in these times. There is enormous uncertainty everywhere, and if you feel overwhelmed, isolated, and discombobulated, you’re not alone. Together, we’re going to try to manage these circumstances as best we can. In this class, we’re going to take it one day and one week at a time. We’re going to be flexible and supportive of each other and with ourselves. We’re going to focus on the big things (like content and skills) and not sweat the small stuff (like interruptions that come with rapidly changing circumstances). I want you to let me know (if you feel comfortable, which I hope you can/do) if and when you are struggling so that I can support as best as possible. Especially as we move back to in-person classes, we’re going to figure things out together with a generous dose of flexibility and grace along the way.

Course Instructor

I am a Ph.D. of American government and politics with specializations in the American presidency, public policy, and polarization. My research focuses on presidential governance via the executive order and how political factors influence the ability of presidents to issue their most significant orders. I have taught UCDC’s presidency seminar since the Fall 2017 quarter. Before UCDC, I taught classes about public policy and Congress at the University of Maryland to students who had internships related to those fields in a format similar to the UCDC program. Outside of the classroom, I work at Community Change & Community Change Action, non-profit organizations focused on building a movement led by everyday people to create change in their communities and across the country. As the Electoral Data Manager, I work with many different teams and partner organizations to identify target audiences for our work and track the work we are doing in communities affected by injustice. I’m originally from Michigan but have lived in the DC area for over a decade.

Course Description

Most of us have been inundated with elections and politics for the past year. Many Americans can name several presidents and even have opinions on “good” versus “bad” presidents. But what do they actually do and how do we measure and evaluate their performance and our expectations for their leadership? What can we expect during the next three years of a Biden-Harris administration? This course will put the modern presidency in historical and theoretical context, drawing on a variety of readings and approaches to determine which framework best explains presidential (in)action. At its core, this class is about the question of executive power in democratic government. In addition to studying and reflecting on the theme of presidential power, we will also consider the limits to this power and how presidents achieve their goals. Ultimately, we aim to understand the work of the presidency and some of the different perspectives by which we might analyze or assess presidents and their administrations.

Disclaimer: We will deal with real world issues of today. Our discussions will reflect these parameters and engage in some controversial topics. This is an important part of our course, and you should be prepared to understand the politics of the situation separated from your own views.

Learning Objectives

The UCDC program emphasizes experiential learning and critical thinking and writing, which will be reflected in the work of this seminar.

- Objective #1: Students will read the syllabus in its entirety to have a thorough understanding of course materials and expectations.
- Objective #2: Students will complete assigned readings, participate in discussions, and produce written pieces about the American presidency, questions of presidential power, and relevant current events each week in class.
- Objective #3: Students will write a research paper (including but going beyond class readings) to pose and answer a question about the American presidency and presidential power.
- Objective #4: Students will experience a cultural, historic, policy, or other event in DC that relates to the course and/or their internship.
- Objective #5: Students will successfully complete an internship, gain/develop professional experience, and gain/develop familiarity with Washington, DC, and their classmates.

Course Materials and Accessibility

All course readings will be available online through Canvas or other online resources. We will not be using any textbooks this quarter. Students should also read major daily news sources (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, CNN, Politico, etc.) to stay connected with current events and topics within American politics and the presidency. To facilitate our time together in a modified in-person setting, it would be helpful to have a laptop you can use in class (with headphones) and your cell phone.

I reserve the right to make changes to the course materials as the term progresses. This includes, but is not limited to, adding and subtracting topics and readings.

Course Responsibilities and Assignments

All written assignments will be submitted via Canvas. Any late work will be penalized with a lower grade at the rate of one letter grade per calendar day, but it is always better to submit an assignment late than not at all in this class (regardless of the assessed penalty). All assignments, especially the final research paper, should be drafted/stored in such a way that they are automatically saved and accessible to you from anywhere.

We will be flexible in how we use our time together, whether remote or in-person. We will probably use a mix of synchronous (whole group together) and asynchronous (lone, separate) work to make the most of our time. We'll adjust and adapt as necessary.

Grades in the course derive from the below components:

- **Class engagement (30%):** You are responsible for completing all of the assigned readings and engaging in our class/group discussions and activities. Grades here are based on the quality of your contributions and questions (spoken, Zoom, Canvas, Slido, etc.), evidence of informed/insightful contributions, connections of academic material with the real world, completion of in-class assignments, and meaningful interactions with your peers (during whole class and break out group discussions and activities). As a seminar, this class is

dependent on your participation and engagement, both within a given class and over the course of the quarter. As the instructor, I will clarify concepts and try to highlight key ideas via questions, but the course will not simply be a three-hour lecture where I provide all of the material each week.

- You will complete an “exit ticket” assignment on Canvas every week, where you will reflect on your own participation and engagement for that week’s class (taking into account the above categories and below table from Villanova). I will factor in what I observe in class and what you provide in the exit ticket, and the grade you receive on each exit ticket is your participation/engagement grade for the week.

	Strong work ¹	Needs development	Unsatisfactory
Listening	Actively and respectfully listens to peers and instructor	Sometimes displays lack of interest in comments of others	Projects lack of interest or disrespect for others
Preparation	Arrives fully prepared with all assignments completed, and notes on reading, observations, questions	Sometimes arrives unprepared or with only superficial preparation	Exhibits little evidence of having read or thought about assigned material
Quality of contributions	Comments are relevant and reflect understanding of: assigned text(s); previous remarks of other students; and insights about assigned material	Comments sometimes irrelevant, betray lack of preparation, or indicate lack of attention to previous remarks of other students	Comments reflect little understanding of either the assignment or previous remarks in seminar
Impact on seminar	Comments frequently help move seminar conversation forward	Comments sometimes advance the conversation, but sometimes do little to move it forward	Comments do not advance the conversation or are actively harmful to it
Frequency of participation	Actively participates at appropriate times	Sometimes participates but at other times is “tuned out”	Seldom participates and is generally not engaged

- **Administration memo (10%):** You will write a memo to the Biden-Harris administration about how it would employ one of our readings to pursue one of its policy priorities. This memo will be 2-3 double-spaced pages and provide a brief summary of the author’s argument and an analysis of what it would look like for the administration to pursue success using this particular strategy/model. The memo should be focused on one specific reading and an actual policy priority for the administration (as outlined by the [White House](#)) and provide some critical thinking about what the concepts from our readings would look like in practice.
 - Grades will be based on writing and focus, presentation of a developed analysis, use of relevant materials, and interesting discussion of the topic. Please refer to the assignment description and rubric available on Canvas.
 - Citations (via in-text or footnotes) and a bibliography are required.
 - The paper is due via Canvas on Friday, May 6, by 11:59pm ET.
- **Experiential report (10%):** You will attend (virtually or in-person) at least one congressional or other government hearing or briefing, a think tank seminar or lecture, a cultural event hosted by an organization or embassy, an NGO/advocacy/nonprofit event, or similar event (please check with me if you have questions). At any point in the quarter before March 4, you will submit a brief report of 2-3 double-spaced pages about the event, its content, something you learned, and how it relates to your internship. If there are any connections to our course and its topics, you should include those observations as well.

- Grades will be based on clearly communicating about the event, what you learned from it, and your observations. Please refer to the assignment description and rubric available on Canvas.
- The top of the report (before you start your narrative) should include pertinent details about the event: who held the event, where it happened, when it happened, the type of event (hearing, briefing, lecture, guest speaker, etc.), and an approximate count of the audience/viewership size.
- The report is due via Canvas on Friday, May 27, by 11:59pm ET.
- **Research paper (50%):** You will write a 15¹ double-spaced page research paper based on some topic of interest related to presidential power. These thoughtful research papers should be rooted in our study of the presidency and explore a question you have formulated about this topic broadly considered. We will develop and define your research question together with pieces of the final paper due throughout the quarter via Canvas.
 - Final grades will be based on writing and focus, clarity of purpose, presentation of a developed question and answer, use of relevant literature and materials, and interesting discussion of the topic. Please refer to the assignment description and rubric available on Canvas.
 - This is a formal research paper. Citations and a bibliography are required.
 - You should assume a relatively educated audience that is interested in the topic but uninformed about the particular question presented.
 - The research paper is scaffolded, meaning you will turn in different pieces that build on each other over the course of the term. All pieces of your paper that you submit before the final submission should include your name and research question to help ensure alignment. If there is an element of the research paper that you don't turn in for whatever reason, the actual paper will be worth even more of your final grade.
 - The final paper is due on Friday, June 3, by 11:59pm ET via Canvas.

Grading Standards and Measurements

Throughout the course, I will provide comments and suggestions whenever possible on assignments. You have the ability to discuss grades and raise your concerns about all assignments. If you want to dispute a grade, you must wait at least 24 hours from the time the graded assignment is returned and must file your request within seven days of the assignment's return. Requests for grade reevaluation on particular assignments that are submitted outside of this time or not in writing will not be considered. Such requests should be written and include clear reasoning regarding grounds for reevaluation. Upon review, grades may be lowered, raised, or stay the same.

The class will use the following scale of grades to percentages as shown below. I will only consider letters of recommendation for students who earn an A or higher in the course.

99 – 100 A+	87 – 89 B+	77 – 79 C+	67 – 69 D+	
94 – 98 A	83 – 86 B	73 – 76 C	63 – 66 D	<60 F
90 – 93 A-	80 – 82 B-	70 – 72 C-	60 – 62 D-	

¹ Several campuses require 20-page research papers for major or other course credit. Students should check with their campus advisors before turning in a final paper that is less than 20 pages in length.

Please note that the grades earned from our seminar will constitute 100% of the course grade for quarter students and 85% of the course grade for semester students (with the other 15% coming from your 4-week research module).

Course Communication

The most direct ways of getting in touch with me is my UCDC e-mail (above) or via Canvas. In most cases, I will respond to e-mails/messages within 24 hours of receipt, though turnaround time may be longer on breaks and weekends. You are also encouraged to use office hours to talk about specific issues with the class or other topics. I will also use Canvas to share some announcements and information about our classes.

Attendance

It is crucial that you attend every class because a seminar requires the participation of its members. It is assumed that you have worked out your internship schedule so as to not conflict with this course. Please arrive on time for class and plan to stay for the entirety of the class. Everyone will get one absence for which you do not need an excuse (though still communicating the absence ahead of time is appreciated for awareness and planning purposes). Beyond that first absence, you will need to provide an explanation for the absence (preferably in advance) for a determination on whether or not it will be excused. I will hold this information confidentially and don't require detailed documentation like doctor notes, but you should be in communication about what's going on. Failing to report an absence with explanation automatically constitutes an unexcused absence that will lower your final course grade.

Within the above, we will also be mindful of the uncertainty of our current environment and the procedures that need to be put in place around COVID exposure and relevant protocols. Accommodations for virtually "attending" class will be made when participants are sick and/or quarantining under UCDC protocols.

Regardless of whether the absence is excused or unexcused, you are still responsible for the material covered and assignments due that day. Absences for religious holidays and observances will be accommodated. Please contact me in writing as soon as possible so we can plan accordingly if you have such an observance that will affect class attendance or participation. If your internship site has a special event that you would like to attend during regularly scheduled class time, you should discuss it with me before the day of the event. Once per quarter, we can accommodate such an event, though you are still responsible for the material covered and assignments due that day. Additionally, you will need to write a 1-2 page description of what the event was, your role at the event, and what you learned while there. Failure to submit such a report will make the absence unexcused (and therefore lower your grade).

Weather Emergencies

In the event of a weather emergency, UCDC follows the federal government's decisions about delayed starts and closures.

Academic Misconduct

UCDC has a zero-tolerance policy for cheating, plagiarism, and any other form of dishonesty. Students should refer to their home campus Student Code of Conduct for the regulations that apply to them. The burden is on each student to know what behaviors constitute cheating and plagiarism. Ignorance of these behaviors is not an adequate defense.

Class Conduct

The following operating norms of interaction are necessary for a successful course. You are expected to abide by these guidelines in your participation and interactions:

- The value and quality of people in the class is never in question.
- The value and quality of work and ideas in the class is always in question.
- Being present to participate is both a “physical” and mental state. It’s not enough to just be sitting in the room but not participating or paying attention. It’s easy to get distracted by having an entire world at our disposal, but you and your classmates will get the most out of our time together if we keep these distractions to a minimum. Please join class on time (even a few minutes early) and plan to stay the full time.
- We are still operating in a pandemic world so should bear in mind some of the adjustments that need to be made. It is UCDC policy for us to wear masks whenever we are in common spaces, including the classroom. We need to refrain from eating and drinking in class to facilitate keeping masks on. We will try to take more frequent breaks so that people can tend to their needs and safely remove their masks in the comfort of home.
- We will develop some additional norms and agreements in our initial class(es) together.

Statement on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence

The University of California is committed to creating and maintaining a community where all individuals who participate in University programs and activities can work and learn together in an atmosphere free of harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. Every member of the community should be aware that the University prohibits sexual harassment and sexual violence, and that such behavior violates both law and University policy. The University will respond promptly and effectively to reports of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and will take appropriate action to prevent, to correct, and when necessary, to discipline behavior that violates this policy on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence.

Students who wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct should contact UCDC’s Counseling Services (ucdccounseling@gmail.com). Students who wish to report sexual misconduct or to ask questions about UCDC policies and procedures regarding sexual misconduct may do so with any UCDC faculty/staff or contact Debbie Deas, Director of Student Services (debbie.deas@ucdc.edu or 202-872-8937). Because the University of California is legally obligated to investigate reports of sexual misconduct, the confidentiality of reported misconduct cannot be guaranteed. You can read the full UC policy [HERE](#).

Statement on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

In compliance with the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Public Law 93- 112) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-336), University of California policy prohibits unlawful discrimination on the basis of disability in its programs, services, and activities. If you require an accommodation, please let me know at our first meeting (if not earlier) so the necessary arrangements can be made. You can read the full UC policy [HERE](#).

Schedule

Our class will follow the below schedule. This plan is subject to change at my discretion with due notice given to students with regard to readings, order of topics, and adjusting assignments and deadlines. If you’re reading this sentence, please send me an e-mail with subject line “fun fact” and include one interesting fact about yourself for extra credit (and to help me get to know you).

1. March 24 Introducing Presidents & the Presidency
2. March 31 Presidential Elections
Campbell, James E. 2016. "Forecasting the 2016 American National Elections." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 49(4): 649-654.
Stevenson, Peter W. 2016. "Trump is headed for a win, says professor who has predicted 30 years of presidential outcomes correctly." *Washington Post*. 23 September 2016.

Due Friday, April 1, by 11:59pm ET: Paper research question

3. April 7 Presidential Transitions and Governance
Kamarck, Elaine C. 2015. "Run the Government Before It Runs Over You." *New York Times*. 15 October 2015.
McCurry, Mike. 2008. "Memorandum to the President-Elect." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 38(4): 700-706.
Kinane, Christina M. 2021. "Control without Confirmation: The Politics of Vacancies in Presidential Appointments." *American Political Science Review* 115(2): 599-614.
Kumar, Martha Joynt. 2021. "Joseph Biden's Effective Presidential Transition: 'Started Early, Went Big.'" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 51(3): 582-608.
Pffifner, James P. 2021. "Organizing the Biden Presidency." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 51(4): 818-838.
4. April 14 Power and Persuasion
Nelson, Michael. 2010. "Neustadt's 'Presidential Power' at 50." *Chronicle Review*. 2 April 2010.

Due Friday, April 15, by 11:59pm ET: Paper working bibliography

5. April 21 Presidents and Congress
Canes-Wrone, Brandice. 2001. "The President's Legislative Influence from Public Appeals." *American Journal of Political Science* 45(2): 313-329.
Edwards, George C., III. 2021. "Was Donald Trump an Effective Leader of Congress?" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Forthcoming.
Kamarck, Elaine. 2021. "Biden's 100-Day Strategy: Under-Promise and Over-Deliver." *Brookings*. Online. 28 April 2021.
Burns, Sarah. 2021. "Legalizing a Political Fight: Congressional Abdication of War Powers in the Bush and Obama Administrations." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 51(3): 462-491.

Due Friday, April 22, by 11:59pm ET: Paper topic statement

6. April 28 Presidents and Unilateralism
Mayer, Kenneth R., and Kevin Price. 2002. "Unilateral Presidential Powers: Significant Executive Orders, 1949-99." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32(2): 367-386.
Thrower, Sharece. 2017. "The President, the Court, and Policy Implementation." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 47(1): 122-145.

Baker, Peter. 2019. "Trump Declares a National Emergency, and Provokes a Constitutional Clash." *New York Times*. 15 February 2019.

Due Friday, April 29, by 11:59pm ET: Paper draft introduction

7. May 5 Presidents and Parties
Skowronek, Stephen. 1986. "Notes on the Presidency in the Political Order." *Studies in American Political Development* 1: 286-302.
Kreitner, Richard. 2016. "What Time Is It? Here's What the 2016 Election Tells Us About Obama, Trump, and What Comes Next." *The Nation*. 22 November 2016.

Due Friday, May 6, by 11:59pm ET: Administration Memo (page 3)

8. May 12 Presidents and the Courts
Krutz, Glen S., Richard Fleisher, and Jon R. Bond. 1998. "From Abe Fortas to Zöe Baird: Why Some Presidential Nominations Fail in the Senate." *American Political Science Review* 92(4): 871-881.
King, Jonathan M., and Ian Ostrander. 2020. "Prioritizing Judicial Nominations after Presidential Transitions." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 50(3): 592-610.

Due Thursday, May 12, in class: Paper draft outline & 5-7 page excerpt

- May 19 No class – work on papers
9. May 26 Presidents and their Problems
Anonymous. 2018. "I Am Part of the Resistance Inside the Trump Administration." *New York Times*. Online. 5 September 2018.
Savage, Charlie. 2019. "How the Impeachment Process Works." *New York Times*. Online. 24 September 2019.
Prokop, Andrew. 2019. "Impeachment of the President, Explained." *Vox*. Online. 3 January 2019.

This class will take place at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery. Please meet at the entrance at 8th and G Streets NW at 3:00pm ET.

Due Friday, May 27, by 11:59pm ET: Experiential Report (page 3)

10. June 2 Presidents and Legacies
Hult, Karen M. 2021. "Assessing the Trump White House." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 51(1): 35-50.
Comstock, Barbara. 2021. "My Fellow Republicans, Stop Fearing This Dangerous and Diminished Man." *New York Times*. Online. 9 June 2021.

Due Friday, June 3, by 11:59pm ET: Final paper