

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

UCDC Winter 2021 Quarter
Thursdays 3:00-6:00pm PT via Zoom

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Remote Classes During Pandemic and Crisis

A year 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 in very good company. 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 Wifi connections and other interruptions that come along with living, learning, and working all within the same space). 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. This is new for all of us, and we’re going to figure it out together with a 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 nearly a decade now.

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 four 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, especially at a time when we transition from one administration to another.

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 successfully complete an internship, gain/develop professional experience, and gain/develop familiarity with Washington, DC, and their classmates.

Course Materials and Accessibility

Course readings will be available online through Canvas or other online resources. Readings will be linked in the syllabus as often as possible, and 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. We may try some new technologies throughout the quarter so please also have your cell phone with you during class to facilitate parts of our discussions.

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

Grades in the course derive from the following components. Any late work will be penalized with a lower grade at the rate of one letter grade per calendar day. 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 (like Google docs). Issues that arise from papers being deleted without saving or travel that impedes the ability to (re)submit an assignment on time do not constitute special circumstances, and those assignments will be penalized as detailed below. For all assignments, especially the final paper, you should look for confirmation (e-mailed or via Canvas) affirming that the file is received and accessible/readable. Most assignments will be submitted via Canvas.

Our time together each week will be a mix of synchronous (whole group together) and asynchronous (independent, off-camera) work. Generally, our asynchronous work will come in the middle of class with us beginning and ending class time together. We'll adjust and adapt as necessary.

- **Class participation (25%):** You are responsible for completing all of the reading assignments listed on the schedule below for each week of class. Grades here are based on the quality of your discussion and questions (spoken live, Zoom chat, Canvas discussion board, 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. As a seminar, your participation is crucial to the flow of class, 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.

- **Reading responses (15%):** You will write 5 reading responses throughout the quarter, starting on January 14. Each response should be two-thirds to a full single-spaced page and use at least one of the readings for that week as a way of discussing concepts, contrasting arguments, etc. The topic is your choice as long as it makes a serious effort to engage (not just summarize) the readings. Completing these assignments should help you prepare for discussions in class: look for disagreements between authors, questions the readings raise, problems or gaps you find in the readings, whether or not the arguments still hold, etc. You should use parenthetical citations (author and page number) for quotations and construct your response with complete sentences and paragraphs but do not otherwise need to provide a bibliography or formal citations. Please see the sample available in Canvas for guidance.
 - The first response is due on January 14. Everyone has a response paper due this day.
 - The next 2 responses are due by February 11.
 - The final 2 responses are due by March 11.
 - The reading responses should be submitted via Canvas during whichever week you use the readings. Don't wait until February 11 to submit your 2nd and 3rd responses (and March 11 for your 4th and 5th responses). Those are the milestone deadlines.

- **Current event paper (10%):** You will write a short paper about one of the four following speeches: Trump's concession speech (TBD), Trump's farewell address (TBD), Biden's victory speech (November 7), Biden's inaugural address (January 20). Choose a section of any of these speeches to write a 2-3 double-spaced page analysis about what you see/hear in the speech, the purpose of that text, and how it relates to anything we've read or discussed for class. The paper can use several short quotations from the text of the speech/address to help make your point and provide support for your analysis but should not include any block quotations.
 - Note: If Trump does not give either of the two speeches, we may expand the list of available speeches that can be used for this paper.
 - Grades will be based on writing and focus, presentation of a developed analysis, use of relevant materials, and interesting discussion of the topic.
 - Citations and a bibliography are required.
 - The paper is due via Canvas Friday, February 26, by 9:00pm PT.

- **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. The rubric is available on Canvas.
 - This is a formal research paper. Citations and a bibliography are required.

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.

- You should assume a relatively educated audience that is interested in the topic but uninformed about the particular question presented.
- All pieces of your paper that you submit before the final submission should include your name and research question.
- The final paper is due Friday, March 12, by 9:00pm PT via both Turnitin and Canvas.
- Please note that I must have an accessible, readable copy of the paper by March 16 at the very latest (with penalties applied). Failure to get me a copy of the paper by then will constitute a failing grade in the class.

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-	

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 module at the end of the semester).

Course Communication

The most direct way of getting in touch with me is e-mail. In most cases, I will respond to e-mails 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 (after the first one).

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).

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 front of the computer but not participating or paying attention. It’s easy to get distracted by having an entire world at our disposal (especially when we’re accessing class through the same devices that take us to social media, shopping, and more), 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 (at 3:00pm PT) and plan to stay the full time.
- I am the only one who will record any parts of class for cases when we want to capture important concepts, themes, or discussions for future reference (with videos being uploaded to Canvas afterward). I will provide notice in these cases so that you can turn off cameras, change names, etc. during these times.
- We will develop some additional norms and agreements (being on camera as much as possible, muting when not talking, names on Zoom, food/drink during class, etc.) during our first class 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 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, Acting 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 [click here](#) for the full UC policy.

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 [click here](#) for the full UC policy.

Schedule

Our class will follow the below schedule. This plan is subject to change at my discretion with due notice given to the students with regard to readings, order of topics, and adjusting assignments and their 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. January 7 Introducing Presidents & the Presidency

2. January 14 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.
Gordon, Allison. 2020. "History Professor Who Has Accurately Predicted Every Election Since 1984 Says Trump Will Lose." *CNN*. 8 August 2020.

Due Thursday, January 14, at 3pm PT: First reading response (see page 3)
Due Friday, January 15, by 11:59 pm PT: Research question (single question)

3. January 21 Presidential Transitions and Governance
Kamarck, Elaine C. 2015. "Run the Government Before It Runs Over You." *New York Times*. 15 October 2015.
Anonymous. 2018. "I Am Part of the Resistance Inside the Trump Administration." *New York Times*. Online. 5 September 2018.
Shear, Michael D. 2020. "Miles Taylor, a Former Homeland Security Official, Reveals He Was 'Anonymous.'" *New York Times*. 28 October 2020.
Burke, John P. 2017. "The Trump Transition, Early Presidency, and National Security Organization." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 47(3): 574-596.

4. January 28 Power and Persuasion
Wegge, David G. 1981. "Neustadt's 'Presidential Power': The Test of Time and Empirical Research on the Presidency." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 11(3): 342-347.
Nelson, Michael. 2010. "Neustadt's 'Presidential Power' at 50." *Chronicle Review*. 2 April 2010.

Due Friday, January 29, by 11:59 pm PT: Topic statement

5. February 4 Presidents and Congress
Bond, Jon R. 2019. "Which Presidents Are Uncommonly Successful in Congress? A Trump Update." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 49(4): 898-908.
Edwards, George C., III. 2021. "Was Donald Trump an Effective Leader of Congress?" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Forthcoming.

Due Friday, February 5, by 11:59 pm PT: Working bibliography

6. February 11 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.
Warber, Adam L., Yu Ouyang, and Richard W. Waterman. 2017. "Landmark Executive Orders: Presidential Leadership Through Unilateral Action." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 48(1): 110-126.
Lowande, Kenneth S. 2014. "After the Orders: Presidential Memoranda & Unilateral Action." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 44(4): 724-741.
Baker, Peter. 2019. "Trump Declares a National Emergency, and Provokes a Constitutional Clash." *New York Times*. 15 February 2019.

By Thursday, February 11, at 3pm PT: 3rd reading response papers

7. February 18 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, February 19, by 11:59 pm PT: Draft introduction

8. February 25 Presidents and Policy Leadership
Wildavsky, Aaron. 1966. "The Two Presidencies." *Trans-Action* 4(2).
Canes-Wrone, Brandice, William G. Howell, David E. Lewis. 2008. "Toward a Broader Understanding of Presidential Power: A Reevaluation of the Two Presidencies Thesis." *Journal of Politics* 70(1): 1-16.

Due Thursday, February 25, at 3pm PT: Draft outline and 5-7 page section of paper

9. March 4 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.

10. March 11

Presidents and Legacies

Goldsmith, Jack. 2018. "Will Donald Trump Destroy the Presidency?" *The Atlantic*. 12 September 2017.

Collinson, Stephen. 2020. "Trump Threatens 30-Day Reign of Destruction on the Way Out of Office." *CNN*. 22 December 2020.

Jacobson, Gary C. 2020. "Donald Trump and the Parties: Impeachment, Pandemic, Protest, and Electoral Politics in 2020." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 50(4): 762-795.

**By Thursday, March 11, at 3pm PT: 5th reading response papers
Due Friday, March 12, by 6:00 pm PT: Final paper**