

**DRAFT**  
**The Presidency and Executive Branch**  
**Thematic Research Seminar**  
**University of California Washington Center**  
**Fall 2011**

**Instructors: Robert Dallek; Matthew Dallek**

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**Office: Room 324**

Class meets Fridays, Room 318, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

**Description**

The White House, located in the heart of downtown Washington and just a ten minute walk from UCDC, is an international symbol that simultaneously highlights the lofty promise of American democracy and reflects the significant flaws in the American experiment. This research seminar will examine the strengths and drawbacks of presidential leadership, the evolving role of the presidency in American culture, and introduce students to some major thematic debates that define presidential politics. The seminar will draw on the city of Washington as an experience through visits to current and former White House aides, news correspondents, and political and policy experts. Seminar topics include how presidents have sought to enact their reform agendas from the New Deal to Reagan's economic program to President Obama's health reform law; how they have struggled to manage foreign affairs while leading the U.S. in wartime; why Congress, the Supreme Court, and the news media thwart and assist presidential agendas at different moments; how presidents have harnessed the "bully pulpit" in the modern age to rally voters to their ideas, push their policies, and position themselves for re-election; and how they have pursued various strategies for manipulating a highly volatile, increasingly hostile Washington media climate.

The seminar is designed for UCDC students interning in the executive branch, the news media, or other organizations whose work is affected by the conduct of the presidency. During the term, students will pick a research topic that interests them (and has a loose connection to their internships), conduct original research into their topic, and draft a research paper and a series of applied writing assignments including a White House policy memo, a presidential press release and a political or policy speech about their chosen issue. In-class lectures and discussions of the readings will be a vital part of this course, and the seminar will also feature guest lectures, field trips to relevant places of historical interest in Washington, and visits with White House staff in the White House complex.

### *Instructors*

Robert Dallek is a leading presidential historian and well-known author. His writing has appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. He is a recently retired Professor of History at Boston University and has previously taught at Columbia University, UCLA, Oxford, and the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas. He has won the Bancroft Prize, was a Pulitzer finalist, and authored a #1 *New York Times* best-selling biography of President John F. Kennedy. He has been a Montgomery Fellow and a visiting professor at Dartmouth and also teaches courses on the presidency at Stanford in Washington.

Matthew Dallek is an associate academic director at the University of California Washington Center, where he has taught politics and history since 2008. He holds a Ph.D. in U.S. history from Columbia and a B.A. in history from U.C. Berkeley. He is the author of *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics*, and his second book will examine how the Roosevelt Administration defended America during World War II. His articles and book reviews have appeared in the *Washington Post*, the *L.A. Times*, *Slate*, *Politico* and the *Atlantic*. He has held fellowships at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars among other places, and he worked as chief speechwriter to House Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt from 2000 to 2002.

### **Requirements and Evaluation**

Students will be required to attend class, finish all of the reading assignments, actively participate in section discussion, draft a research paper, and submit three applied writing assignments. (See below for a breakdown of how grades will be assigned.) Field trips that occur during class time are mandatory; field trips that occur outside of the regularly scheduled class meetings are optional. All students should read the national and international sections of *The Washington Post*, *New York Times* or *Politico* on a daily basis—along with any blogs or other media outlets of their choice that cover American politics and policy. (A full list of relevant blogs and other sites will be provided in class.)

### *Research Brief*

Students will select a policy, historical, political or other analytical challenge about the American presidency. Then they will craft a major research question, conduct original research (drawing on relevant primary and secondary sources including memos, newspaper articles, academic studies, government reports), and draft a 10-15 page research paper that responds to the question raised in their research proposal. The paper should be as focused and as concrete as possible—the more specific your topic is, the more manageable and persuasive your paper will probably be. Ultimately, each paper must include the following elements: a research question; an analysis of the relevant literature; background information about your topic; and a detailed and substantive analytical section that addresses the research question posed in the paper's introduction. This assignment is



designed to give you maximum flexibility to pursue research on a topic that is meaningful to you, but your research question must be approved by the instructor, and your project must be relevant, interesting, and manageable within the parameters of this ten-week course.

### *Applied Writing Assignments*

After writing the research paper, all students will complete three brief applied writing assignments on the topic that you've selected for your research paper. These assignments should form a writing portfolio that can be used when applying for jobs in Washington D.C. and beyond. The assignments include a 1-2 page memo to the President that makes an argument – pro or con – about a legislative, political, policy or social or historical controversy related to your topic; a 1-2 page speech announcing a presidential decision on the controversy in question; and a 1-2 page op-ed or press release by a Cabinet Secretary or senior White House aide that seeks to frame the topic in ways that are favorable to the president's agenda and defends the President from critics.

### **Grading Breakdown:**

Participation--20%

Research Proposal (one page)--10%

Research Paper (10-15 pages)--40%

White House Memo (one to two pages)--10%

Presidential Speech (one to two pages)--10%

Press Release, Op-Ed, or Congressional Testimony (one to two pages)--10%

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### *Introduction*

#### *Week 1—The Origins and Evolution of Presidential Power*

James P. Pfiffner, *The Modern Presidency*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Ch. 1, "The Presidency: Origins and Powers"

#### *Week 2—Checks and Balances: Intra-branch Conflict and the Imperial Presidency*

Richard Ellis and Michael Nelson, eds., "Debating the Presidency."

*The Federalist Papers*

James P. Pfiffner, *The Modern Presidency*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Ch. 6, "The President and Congress"

#### *Week 3--From the New Deal to Reagan's Revolution—Reforming America*

William Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940*. Chs. 3-4

Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*. "Washington" (pps. 111-153)

Kim Phillips-Fein, *The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal*.

Week 4—*Presidents Abroad--Crafting Foreign Policy, Defining National Security*

2002 National Security Strategy of the United States

George Edwards, *Readings in Presidential Politics*.

Week 5--*Vietnam and Iraq—Leading America into Battle*

Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco*

Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack*

David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*

Week 6--“*The Vision Thing*”—*Campaigns and Elections*

Diane Hollern Harvey, “The Public’s View of Clinton,” in *The Postmodern Presidency: Bill Clinton’s Legacy in U.S. Politics*. ed., Steven E. Schier

John F. Harris, “A Clouded Mirror: Bill Clinton, Polls, and the Politics of Survival,” in *The Postmodern Presidency*.

Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*. Ch. 17

Joe McGinniss, *The Selling of the President*.

View Alexandra Pelosi’s HBO documentary, *Journeys with George*  
View *The War Room*

Week 7--*The Culture of the Presidency--Symbols, Narratives, Images, Myths*

Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Performance of Politics: Obama’s Victory and the Democratic Struggle for Power*. Prologue, Chs 1, 3-4

Robert Dallek, “The Medical Ordeals of JFK,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 2002

<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/2002/12/dallek.html>

Michael Schudson with Elliot King, “The Illusion of Ronald Reagan’s Popularity,” in Schudson, *The Power of News*. Ch. 6.

Week 8—*The Culture of the Presidency—Part II*

Anne Kornblut, *Notes from the Cracked Ceiling: Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and What It Will Take for a Woman to Win*. Intro., Chs. 1, 8

Jeffrey Toobin, *A Vast Conspiracy*

Ben McGrath, “The Movement: The Rise of Tea Party Activism,” *The New Yorker*, February 1, 2010

Week 9--*The Bully Pulpit—Its Power and Limitations*

Lawrence W. Levine and Cornelia R. Levine, *The People and the President: America's Conversation with FDR*. Introduction; and "the First Hundred Days: July 24 and October 22, 1933"

Mary Frances Berry and Josh Gottheimer, *Power in Words: The Stories Behind Barack Obama's Speeches, from the State House to the White House*. Chs. 2, 4, 8

Robert Schlesinger, *White House Ghosts: Presidents and their Speechwriters, from FDR to George W. Bush*. Ch. 12

Peggy Noonan. *What I Saw at the Revolution*

View Richard Nixon's "Checkers" Speech in Class

Week 10—*Presidential Messaging in the Age of Twitter*

Jeffrey E. Cohen. *The Presidency in the Era of 24 Hour News*

Mark Feldstein, *Poisoning the Press: Richard Nixon, Jack Anderson, and the Rise of Washington's Scandal Culture*. Chs. 12-14

Michael Schudson, *The Power of News*. Chs. 5, 7

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