Political Science Capstone Seminar
The US Presidency
PSCI 4952-001
Fall 2025

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Course Overview

This course is a capstone seminar designed to apply what you have learned as a political science major to the substantive topic of the American presidency. Culminating in an original research paper, we will study presidential leadership, the historical grounding of the office, its place in a system of separated powers, and the role of the president in an institution. Covering the president's relationship to the news media and public opinion, we will conclude the course with a review of the presidential nomination and electoral processes, with a look ahead to the next election. Throughout the course, we will discuss some findings of the scholarly community and apply our understanding to current events.

Course Goals

1) Evaluate the role of the presidency as a key institution in the American political system.

2) Analyze the effectiveness of presidential leadership and what makes presidents successful.

3) Think critically and communicate effectively about the topics presented in this course.

Readings

Christenson, Dino P., and Douglas L. Kriner. 2020. *The Myth of the Imperial Presidency.* The University of Chicago Press.

Scholarly articles, available through the UNT Library or via Canvas.

Course Assignments

1.	Midterm Exam	20 %
2.	Book Review	15 %
3.	Research Paper	30 %
4.	Research Slide	10 %
5.	Quizzes	15 %
6.	Engagement	10 %

Course Policies and Procedures

Grading: Grading will follow a standard scale: 90% is an A, 80% is a B, 70% is a C, and 60% is a D. *I do not change grades unless I make a computational error.* Moreover, I do not reveal grades via e-mail or telephone and *there are no opportunities for extra credit*, except those mentioned herein or announced by me in class. I will submit your final grades, which will be visible on my.unt.edu when UNT makes grades official.

If you do poorly on any of the assignments or exams, I advise you to see me as soon as possible. It is your responsibility to seek my help if you need it. Pleading for a higher grade after you complete all assignments will not avail you!

Communications: If you have questions about the class, please see me during my office hours or schedule an appointment to see me. Other than the most rudimentary topics, it is much easier to communicate about class in person. Because I do not reveal grades or schedule makeup exams via e-mail you should see me in my office about these issues. If you choose to e-mail me, please specify a class-related subject on the subject line of your e-mail to ensure that I receive the e-mail. If you choose to e-mail me, it is your responsibility to check frequently for my response. I respond to e-mails very quickly, so please e-mail me directly at Matthew.Eshbaugh-Soha@unt.edu. At times, I may use the announcement feature in Canvas to communicate with the entire class.

Exam: There is one exam for this class. It is designed to test your understanding of assigned readings and lecture material and will consist of a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. You must write answers in blue or black ink on the paper provided.

Makeup exams will only be given with a university excused absence or at the discretion of the professor. Inform me of your absence before or within 48 hours after the examination date, either in person or by e-mail. I will need specific, written documentation to verify the nature and legitimacy of your absence. You must present this documentation to me, in person, during my office hours (or make an appointment) and before the makeup examination date. At that time, I will determine whether you are eligible to take a makeup exam and we will schedule a time for the exam. Except under unusual and equally verifiable circumstances, you must take the makeup exam before the next class period after the regularly scheduled exam. You will have one hour to complete the makeup exam, which consists of answering *one essay question.*

Critical Book Review: You will write a critical book review of *The Myth of the Imperial Presidency.* This book review should summarize the book, which includes identifying the authors' question, the importance of the topic, the author's findings, and his primary conclusions. You should be able to summarize the main points of the book in a concise and clear style. You do not want to go through the book chapter by chapter, summarizing each, but rather offer a general overview, supplementing main points from the book as needed support. If you would like to offer a short critique of the book, you may, but limit this to one concise paragraph. A critique allows you to analyze, for example, whether the authors accomplished what they set out to accomplish or how the book supports or disagrees with class lectures and other readings. The book review should be four pages

long and follow the assignment style guidelines listed at the end of the syllabus. It is due on **October 8 at the beginning of class**. We will also discuss this book at length on that day.

Research Slide: Create **ONE** PowerPoint slide that succinctly communicates your research project and includes the following:
- The **title** of your paper
- Your **research question**
- A description of your **data** collection
- A **graphical display** (e.g., pie charts, bar charts, graphs, etc.) of some of your analysis. Excel can help you to make fantastic graphs and charts!
- A summary of your **findings and conclusion**

The research slide is due on November 19 at the beginning of class.

Research Paper: Write an 8–10-page research paper in which you will address the impact of three variables on the president's success with a weekly topic. **The research paper is due on December 3.**

A capstone course represents the culmination of your learning as a political science student at UNT. As a political science major, you have learned how to summarize and evaluate scholarly findings, collect and analyze data, and write this information in a clear and compelling way. The culmination of these experiences will have prepared you to develop an argument from the literature, derive a specific hypothesis (or expected relationship between two variables), and collect data to evaluate that hypothesis.

You should build your paper from the data presented in your research slide. Among other tips, use the graphical display of your data from your slide in your paper and discuss it in more detail than on the slide. Think about the slide introducing the data, and the paper expanding upon your data.

Class Participation and Engagement: An important component to your intellectual development is being able to discuss intelligently matters pertinent to the presidency and American politics. Therefore, we will incorporate a discussion of current events into most classes. I encourage you to read or watch a quality news source regularly to help contextualize what you learn in class into the current presidency. I will also ask questions periodically throughout each class session; some over current events and some over the readings. Although the easiest way to ensure a satisfactory engagement grade is to speak in class, I will consider other factors including regular attendance, attentiveness to the lectures and discussions, and other evidence of engaging with the material, e.g., seeing me during office hours about the assignments.

Quizzes: To ensure that you engage with the readings, I expect participation in class. If participation is not satisfactory, I will quiz you, so please bring paper and a pen to every class. So that you can plan ahead and prepare remarks, I will communicate precisely the days that we will discuss articles. Some questions to be prepared to answer are: What is the research question in the article? What is the purpose of the paper? What is its focus? What do they find? How can you connect a paper to what we have learned in class? One way to prepare to discuss the readings is to

take notes before class, in the manner illustrated on the reading notes example provided on Canvas. At times, I may allow these or other handwritten notes to be submitted as the basis of your quiz grade.

Attendance: Attendance is expected but not required for this class. Keep in mind that you must attend class to participate in class, and attendance counts favorably toward your engagement grade. Of course, *you are responsible for all materials covered in class.* If you miss a lecture, see a classmate for notes, although you will have access to all slides that I post on canvas. Please do not be late for class, as it is disruptive to not only me, but also your classmates. If you have an issue that requires you to be delayed in arriving to class, please speak with me. It happens. I request the courtesy of you telling me so that I can expect any disruptions to class.

Course Schedule
INTRODUCTION

Week 1, August 18   Introduction and Studying the Presidency

Week 2, August 25   The Constitutional Presidency and Presidential War Power
                           Read: Fisher, Louis. 2006. "What is the Appropriate Role of
                           Congress in National Security Policy?" In *Readings in Presidential
                           Politics,* Edwards, ed. Wadsworth: 263-290.

Week 3, September 3   Presidential Leadership: Historical and Contextual
                           Read: Skowronek, Stephen. "Presidential Leadership in Political
                           Time." In *Presidents and the Political System*, Nelson, ed. CQ Press: 111-
                           156.

Week 4, September 8   The President and Congress
                           Read: Canes-Wrone, Brandice. 2001. "The President's Legislative
                           Influence from Public Appeals." *American Journal of Political Science* 45:
                           313-329.

Week 5, September 15   The President and Congress (cont)

Week 6, September 22   The President and the Courts

Week 7, September 29   The President and the Public
                           Read: Christenson, Kreps, and Kriner. 2021. "Going Public in an Era
                           of Social Media?" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 51: 151-165.

Week 8, October 6   The President and Unilateral Action
                           Read: Christensen and Kriner, *The Myth of the Imperial Presidency*

October 8   **Book Review Due**

Week 9, October 13	The President and the Media
Week 10, October 20	The President and the Bureaucracy Read: Wood, B. Dan. 1988. "Principals, Bureaucrats, and Responsiveness in Clean Air Enforcements." *American Political Science Review* 82: 213-234.
October 24	**Exam 1**
Week 11, October 27	Presidential Decision Making Read:Greenstein, Fred I., and John P. Burke. 1989. "The Dynamics of Presidential Reality Testing: Evidence from Two Vietnam Decisions." *Political Science Quarterly* 104: 557- 580.
October 31	**Paper Workday**
Week 12, November 3	The Institutional Presidency
Week 13, November 10	Presidential Nominations Read: Dowdle, et al. 2025. "Forecasting the 2024 Republican Presidential Nomination." *PS: Political Science* 58: 192-197.
Week 14, November 17	Presidential Elections Read: Tien, Charles, and Michael S. Lewis-Beck. 2025. "The Political Economy Model: Presidential Forecast for 2024." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 58: 248-252.
November 19	**Research Slide due**
Week 15, December 1	Course Conclusions and Final Thoughts
December 3	**Final Paper due**

Assignment: Research Paper

The purpose of this paper is for students to learn more about the many explanations related to presidential leadership and success. To do this, choose one weekly topic from this class and analyze the three primary conditions that promote presidential leadership and success in that area. You could identify and then describe what we know from the literature about three variables that predict presidential success in Congress. Among these, you may argue that one variable is particularly important. Present your expectation as a hypothesis, collect some data that allow you to test the hypothesis, and show how your data support your hypothesis. For example, you may choose to test the hypothesis that presidential success in Congress is driven by party control of Congress. You would review the literature that has already provided support for this hypothesis, and then you would find specific evidence across several presidencies. In addition to showing a figure of your data, you could demonstrate support for this hypothesis by illustrating, for example, that President Obama was more successful on health care reform than immigration policy because of party control of Congress.

The paper's organization is likely to follow this structure, bookended by an introduction and conclusion. That is, you will review relevant research, summarizing scholarship that details the relationship between your three variables and your weekly topic; briefly argue why one variable is particularly important and stating a hypothesis; describe your data; present your results and summarize them. A quality introduction will communicate your paper's topic and its argument. The ultimate and concluding section of the paper will reflect on why you found what you expected to find, why (or why not), how your results fit into the literature you reviewed and, perhaps, what other questions might future scholarship attempt to answer.

The research paper is an 8 to 10-page paper. Please see "paper guidelines" for spacing and format issues. You must use at least 8 peer-reviewed sources to complete this paper. (This means you must cite and incorporate them within the paper.) Peer-reviewed sources are scholarly works, such as university press books or journal articles, on the presidency and American politics. To learn about your president and your cases, *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* is highly recommended. Your paper MUST include at least four journal articles from *The American Journal of Political Science, American Political Science Review, Journal of Politics, Political Research Quarterly, Presidential Studies Quarterly,* or *Congress and the Presidency.* Although in some instances, quality periodicals such as the *National Journal* or *The New York Times* may supplement your research, they do not count toward the 8-source minimum. Wikipedia is not a peer-reviewed source. Avoid it. If you are unsure as to what counts as a peer-reviewed source, please ask.

There are many types of data that you can collect. Be creative. See how other scholars have measured key concepts, and ask if you have questions locating data. Public opinion data and data associated with Congress are readily available from the UNT library and online.

- *Roper Public Opinion Database* (this is available through the UNT library)
- *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press* (people-press.org).
- *The Gallup Poll* (gallup.com)
- *CQ Almanac* (or other CQ resources)

APSA citation style is required for this research paper.

The first step to writing a good paper is organization. Use an outline. If you know how information fits into your paper before you write, you will find writing to be much easier. Use headings. Headings will allow you to break up a lengthy paper into several smaller papers. This will also make writing easier, especially if you have not yet written an 8-to-10-page paper in college.

Paper Guidelines:
1. You are required to submit two versions of your book review and research paper. First, upload your paper in Canvas so that we may produce an AI and plagiarism score through Turnitin. Second, bring a hardcopy to class.

2. The paper must be typed and double-spaced in 12-point font (in the ballpark of Times New Roman or Garamond), and with one-inch margins.

3. All papers must include a title page. A title page contains the following information: The title of the paper, your name, and the date.

4. The title page, references, tables, figures, or endnotes do not count toward the paper's page total.

5. References and figures or tables shall be placed on separate pages after the text of the paper.

6. You must staple each paper in the upper left-hand corner, and number all pages except the title page. No other binding, please.

ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE AS ASSIGNED AND ARE ONLY ACCEPTED LATE AT 10 PERCENT PER CALENDAR DAY LATE. **If I do not have your paper by the deadline, it is late.** *I do not accept e-mailed paper assignments.*

Paper Grading

I will grade your book review on the following criteria:

1. Adherence to "paper guidelines," or paper's overall presentation (10 points)

2. Paper organization and writing: a well-organized and written paper is a good paper (20 points)

3. References: incorporating 8 peer-reviewed sources into your research paper (25 points)

4. Research: ask a thoughtful question (or state a clear thesis or hypothesis), analyze three areas of presidential success, integrate your sources into your research paper, discuss them separately and accurately, and offer a conclusion that follows from your analysis (50 points)

The research portion of the rubric is divided as follows:

- Analyze the impact of three variables on the president's success (20 points)
- State a clear hypothesis and offer a conclusion (10 points)
- Present data that supports your hypothesis (10 points)
- Discuss your findings (10 points)

An A paper, for example, will follow the paper guidelines almost perfectly; will be well-organized with a clear introduction (tell me what you are going to discuss) and thesis (your research question or topic), body (tell me), and conclusion (tell me again); will be well-written with minimal grammatical and spelling mistakes; and will be researched well, integrating all eight sources into a coherent, interesting, and clear argument that stays focused on your thesis. You will not receive an A if you rely too heavily on one source, cite less than the minimum sources, do not organize or write your paper well, or otherwise fail to complete any of the paper requirements.

University Policies and Procedures

Dropping Courses: Please link http://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-registration-guide for information concerning drops, withdraws, and other administrative information.

Course Evaluation: Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) is the student evaluation system for UNT and allows students the ability to confidentially provide constructive feedback to their instructor to improve the quality of student experiences in the course. If over 75 percent of the class completes the SPOT, each student will receive one percentage point of extra credit.

Mobile Device Policy: Although I allow laptops and tablets in class, I do not recommend that you use them. Growing evidence indicates that taking notes by hand improves retention of materials and their understanding. The use of laptops and tablets often leads to checking email and social media or browsing the internet. They may also distract from in-class discussion. If I find that devices become a distraction, I retain the right to ban them in class. Unless you obtain permission from me to access your cell, please silence and store all phones during class.

Americans with Disabilities Act Statement: UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website.

Academic Misconduct: According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

Your first academic integrity violation is subject to a range of penalties, including failing the class. If you commit more than one academic integrity violation, your actions are subject to a review by the Academic Integrity officer. This may involve a hearing in which you are subject to expulsion.

All writing assignments should be written and prepared by the student. The use of AI Writing Tools, such as and including chatGPT, are not permitted in this course even if properly attributed. AI-generated submissions will be treated as a violation of the University's academic integrity policy.

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004): The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment

policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

Acceptable Student Behavior: Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.unt.edu/csrr .

Emergency Notification & Procedures: UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Retention of Student Records: Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend class meetings regularly and to abide by the attendance policy established for the course. It is important that you communicate with the professor and the instructional team prior to being absent, so you, the professor, and the instructional team can discuss and mitigate the impact of the absence on your attainment of course learning goals.

Course Materials and Copyright Statement: The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. By "handouts," I mean all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, exams, in-class materials review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.