The presidency presents a paradox in American government and politics. The president is often referred to as the most powerful person in the world. At some level this is true; he or she is the central focus of US politics and is commander in chief of the armed forces of the United States. Yet presidents regularly disappoint their supporters and have only mixed success in keeping their campaign promises. They cannot easily change public opinion, and most often they cannot get Congress to go along with their policy priorities. They cannot control the actions of foreign nations, and most often they react to international events rather than controlling them. Presidents are single individuals, but in order to accomplish anything, they depend on hundreds of White House staffers, thousands of political appointees, and millions of civil servants and uniformed military. Huge bureaucracies with political power and a momentum of their own constrain presidential choices, in addition to constant criticism by the opposition party.

This course will examine the constitutional origins of the presidency and draw lessons from the nineteenth and early twentieth century. But our main concern will be with the "modern presidency" (since 1933) and more particularly on the "contemporary presidency" in an era of polarized politics. The early part of the course will deal with electoral politics and presidential campaigns. The rest of the course will be devoted to understanding how the office is conducted once a president has been elected, including presidential relations with Congress, White House organization, White House staff, decision making, the Cabinet, presidential appointments, control of the executive branch, and the national security policy making process.

**Texts**
[students should purchase a used copy of this book; new is too expensive]
Other required readings will be emailed to students or can be found on websites.

**Learning Outcomes**
After taking this course, students will be able to:
- Describe the constitutional origins of the presidency
- Explain the development of the modern presidency
- Explain the structure and functions of the White House
Explain the relationship of the White House staff to the rest of the executive branch
Explain the dynamics of political polarization in the United States
Explain the relationship between presidents and Congress
Explain presidential decision making in national security affairs

**Prerequisite:** This course assumes that students have taken a college-level course in American National Government, e.g. GOVT 103. Those students who have not taken such a course will be at a serious disadvantage in this course.

**Classroom Courtesy**

**The use of electronic devices in class is not permitted.** Research (cited below) has demonstrated that note taking on laptops leads to inferior performance on examinations. More importantly, use of laptops is distracting to adjacent students as well as to the user. Do not eat food during class. Turn off cell phone ringers. Surreptitious use of cell phones, etc. will negatively affect your grade. Inevitably, students will disagree with the comments of other students in class; this is to be expected, but the classroom is no place for uncivil behavior. Ad-hominum arguments will not be tolerated; we can disagree without being disagreeable. This course is not about what to think about the presidency, rather it is about how to think about the presidency.

**Course Requirements**

Assignments for the course consist of the readings specified below and class sessions of lectures and discussions. Each student is responsible for all readings and lectures. Education at the college level is about learning how to think about government and politics as much as it is about acquiring information. Since class lectures and discussions convey the former, attendance in class is required. Thoughtful class participation may help your grade, and failure to attend class will adversely affect your grade. Examinations will cover all readings and classroom lecture/discussions. Each student should follow developments in the presidency through the reading of a good daily newspaper such as the *New York Times, The Washington Post*, or *The Wall Street Journal*. A useful source of timely newspaper and magazine articles is the website RealClearPolitics, which brings together articles on opposing sides of important issues.

**Evaluation**

There will be two in-class, closed book exams, a final exam, and one paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam Number One</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>(Tuesday, February 21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam Number Two</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>(Thursday, March 30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>(due Tuesday, May 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>(Thursday, May 11; 7:30am)</td>
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Based on these exams and the paper the following grading scale will be used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>97-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-96</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>B-</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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<td>D+</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>63-66</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Less than 60 = F</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Missing four classes will lower your grade by one half grade (e.g. from a B- to a C+); Missing eight classes (more than 20% of the course) will lower your grade by one full grade (e.g. from a B to a C). No extra credit will be allocated in this course.

There will be no make-up exams, except for documented cases of ill health or emergency. Make-up exams for legitimate excuses will be long-answer essay in format and on different questions than the in-class exams. Students arriving late for an exam may take the exam, but not after the first student test taker has left the room.

Important Dates:
First Exam: Thursday, February 21 (in class)
Second Exam: Thursday, March 30 (in class)
Paper Due: Tuesday, May 2
Final Exam: Thursday, May 11, 7:30am

OUTLINE of the COURSE and ASSIGNMENTS

1. First Class: Introduction and overview of the course (Tuesday, August 30)
   Assignment:
   Read the Syllabus
   Indiana University, “Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It.”
   Miller, The End of Greatness, Introduction, Ch. 1, 2, pp. 1-52.
   Dan Rockmore, “The Case for Banning Laptops in the Classroom,”
   Recommended:
   Carrie B. Fried, “In-class laptop use and its effects on student learning,”

   I. Origins of the Presidency, Elections, and Congress

2. The Constitutional Origins of the Presidency
   Assignment:
   U.S. Constitution: Articles I, II, and III and first 10 amendments (Bill of Rights).
   James Madison, Federalist Papers 10 and 51.
3. Presidential Nominations, primary elections and caucuses

Assignment:
Jill Lepore, “How to Steal an Election: The crazy history of nominating conventions.”
Miller, *The End of Greatness*, Introduction, Ch. 3, pp. 53-80.

4. Presidential Elections

Assignment:
Joe White, “Understanding Elections, Especially Presidential Elections,”
Case Western Reserve University course assignment (July 2016), pp. 1-10
Robert A. Dahl, “Myth of the Presidential Mandate,”

5. The President, Congress, and Polarization

Assignment:
David F. Weiman, “Imagining a world without the New Deal,”
Sarah Binder, “Lessons from the Obama Years,” from *Rivals for Power*, ed. by James
Mini-case study: Health Care Policy
Steven Pearlstein, “Who will really win in an Obamacare repeal?”
Glen Kessler, “Confused by Obamacare? Here are answers to key questions,”
T.R. Reid, “5 Myths about Health Care Around the World,”

First Exam: Tuesday, February 21

II. The institutional Presidency: Controlling the Executive Branch

6. Presidential Persuasion
Assignment:

Ezra Klein, “The Unpersuaded: Who listens to a President?”
Miller, *The End of Greatness*, Ch. 5-7, pp. 105-136.

7. Organizing and Staffing the White House

Assignment:

The Brownlow Committee Report, “The White House Staff,” from
The President’s Committee on Administrative Management (1936).
Martha Kumar, “White House Staff and Organization,”

8. The Cabinet

Assignment:


9. Managing the Executive Branch and Political Appointees

Assignment:

Pfiffner, Unilateral Presidential Authority: Uses and Abuses,” from *Rivals for Power*, ed. by J
James Thurber and Jordan Tama (Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield, 2017),
pp. 1-8 (domestic policy).
Robert Reich, “Locked in the Cabinet,” from *Locked in the Cabinet*

Second Exam: Thursday, March 30
III. Presidential Policy Making and National Security

10. The Constitution and National Security

Assignment:
- Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist Papers 69 and 70.*
- Film: *Fog of War,* Errol Morris.

11. Presidential Decision Making and National Security

Assignment:

Research Paper Due: Tuesday, May 2

13. Abuse of Power

Assignment:
- Miller, *The End of Greatness,* Ch. 13 & Conclusion, pp. 227-256.

14. Presidential Power in Perspective

Assignment:

Final Examination: 7:30-10:15 am, Thursday, May 11. Students arriving late for the exam may take the exam, but not after the first student has left the room.

Office hours

Tuesdays & Thursdays: 8:15 to 8:45am and 10:15 to 11am in Robinson Hall, Room A221.
Thursdays & Thursdays: 2 to 3pm, 524 Founders Hall, Arlington Campus.

My office is in Founders Hall, Room 524, on the Arlington Campus, so my time on the Fairfax campus will be limited. Nevertheless, if you need to see me, send me an email, and we will set up a mutually convenient time to meet, either in Arlington or the Fairfax Campus.

Office: 524 Founders Hall; Phone: 703-993-1417; e-mail: pfiffner@gmu.edu

Email Communication
Course notices and changes to the syllabus or assignments will be sent to students’ GMU e-mail addresses. So even if you do not regularly use your GMU e-mail account, be sure to open it and place a forwarding address to the account you use regularly so that you can get GMU, SPP, and class announcements

Research Paper Requirement
Choose a modern president (FDR-Obama) and write an essay on his long term legacy, that is, his effect on the United States and/or the world. You should focus on policies and actions, not elections or life before the presidency. This is a research paper, so considerable research outside course assignments will be necessary. Be sure to present both positive and negative aspects of the president you choose. An example of an attempt at balance can be found in my article, “The Paradox of President Reagan’s Leadership,” posted on my website: pfiffner.gmu.edu.

Scholarly sources include:
- articles in peer-reviewed scholarly journals
- scholarly books (e.g. books that use footnotes or endnotes)
- papers from think tanks (e.g. Urban Institute, Brookings, Heritage, AEI, etc.)
- reports of governmental organizations (e.g. CRS, CBO, OMB, GAO, departments, etc.)
- some long form journalism (long articles in magazines)

The paper will be approximately 1250 words (about 4-5 double spaced pages); your page count may be slightly longer because of footnotes). MS Word does not include footnotes in its word count unless the preferences have been specifically set to do so.

In your paper, you must cite:
B) Three other sources from assignments from this course.
C) You must also cite at least five other scholarly sources
   (books, formal reports, journal articles, etc.).

For this course, footnotes are required for citations; in-line references are not acceptable. If footnotes are not used, the paper will lose ½ grade (e.g. from A- to B+ or B- to C+). Footnote style is described and illustrated later in this syllabus.

You must submit your paper in both electronic form to my email address; put 308 paper in subject line. The paper must be double spaced, one-sided, 12 point font. No cover page is necessary; merely staple your paper in the top left corner, no special covers. Late papers will be penalized a half
or full grade. The default grade for a paper meeting the minimum requirements is C. In order to earn more than a C, you must write a coherent, grammatically correct paper and go beyond the minimal required use of sources. Syntax is the correct usage of words in a sentence; if a sentence sounds awkward when you proofread your paper, change the wording. It is extremely difficult to write a good paper without revising and editing it several times.

**Writing Your Research Paper**

In order to write a paper, you first have to have something to say. This is why research is necessary. You might have strong opinions about a president, pro or con, but you do not yet know enough about him to write a paper, no matter how strongly you feel. After you have picked your president, find some serious sources about him and read them, or parts of them. (journal articles, scholarly books, biographies, think tank reports, long-form journalism).

To write a coherent analysis, you must use **evidence** and **arguments**.
- Evidence comes from the sources you have read.
- Arguments are formed through the logic of how you present the material.

Your paper must have a unifying theme that is expressible in one sentence. This is what ties the whole paper together. The reader should know how each part of your paper fits into your overall argument.

I will evaluate the papers using the following criteria:
- The coherence of the paper (does your analysis make sense?).
- The evidence presented (the sources that you use).
- The use of syntax and grammar (essential to communicating your analysis).

**In Writing an Essay, Remember:**
- The introduction should say what the paper is about and how you will approach the topic.
- The paper should address one central question and have a thesis.
- The paper should be organized logically, with an evident structure.
- The reader should be told how each part of the paper is related to the other parts.
- Use subheadings to label different sections.
- Outline your paper after it is written to see if it flows logically.
- **Proofread your paper** for spelling and syntax.

**Plagiarism**

**Plagiarism is the use of another’s words or ideas presented as one’s own.** It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another’s work. **If you use more than three or four words of another author, you must indicate their work by placing the words within quotation marks and citing the author.** If you put someone else’s ideas in your own words, be sure to cite the source of the idea.

Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying and cheating. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted
and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career. Plagiarism can easily be avoided by giving credit where credit is due by citing the source you are using.

Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined. The difference between research and plagiarism may be merely an appropriate citation. Proper citation style is specified below. Your paper must be written specifically for this course – no retreads from other courses.

**Grammar**

The singular **possessive** is formed by adding an ’s (e.g. one president’s term was cut short), the plural by s’ (e.g. both presidents’ terms were cut short).

The possessive for it is its: its = possessive, it’s = it is (a contraction).

If you cannot remember the rule for its, do not use an apostrophe and you will be correct.

(That is, use “it is” rather than a contraction and its for the possessive.)

Lead is in your pencil, but **led** is the past tense of the verb to lead.

**Effect** is a noun and **affect** is a verb, almost always - if you do not know the exceptions, do not violate this rule of thumb.

**Cite** is short for citation, **site** is a place (or web location), **sight** refers to eyes.

Horses have **reins**; monarchs **reign** over countries; rain **falls** from the sky: e.g. In London, where it **rains** often, the Queen **reigns**, but the Prime Minister holds the **reins** of power.

Legislation is a singular noun and takes a singular verb. If you want to indicate several results of legislation (law making), use the word “laws.”

**Hints** from William Strunk and E.B. White’s classic, *The Elements of Style* (NY: Macmillan, 1979), pp. vii-viii:

“Place a comma before a conjunction [e.g. and, or, but] introducing an independent clause.”

“Do not join independent clauses by a comma” (use a semicolon or a period).

“The number of the subject determines the number of the verb.”

“Use the active voice.”

“Omit needless words.”

“Make the paragraph the unit of composition.”

“Revise and rewrite.”

**Citations for Research Papers**

The purposes of scholarly citations are several:

1) To show the source for a direct quote or fact not commonly known.

2) To give credit for an idea to the author of a work

3) To show the reader that you are familiar with other scholarship on your topic or to indicate where further information or analysis can be found.

4) You may also use endnotes to explain something in the text or comment on the source.
The intention is to give the reader enough information to find the source you are using so that he or she can see if you have quoted it correctly, interpreted it soundly, done justice to the author cited, or do further research on the topic in question themselves.

**Books:**

author, title (place of publication: publisher, date), page number(s).

[Titles of books should be in italics.]

Example:


After the first full citation, you may use a shortened version:

   e.g. 2. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, page number(s).

**Articles:**

author, title, name of journal (volume, number), page number(s).

[Titles of articles should be enclosed in quotation marks, names of journals underlined or in italics.]

Example:


After first full citation, you may use a shortened version:


**Chapters** in edited Books:

author of chapter (or article), title of chapter, “in” editor of book, title of book (place and date of publication), page numbers.

Example:


**Web Site** Citations:

In addition to author, title, and any other identifying information, include the following information: the organization that put up the site, full URL, date of access.

**Number endnotes (beginning with one) consecutively for the whole paper, with each note referring to the number in the text in superscript or parentheses.** Endnote numbers should be placed after the period and any quotation mark, at the end of the sentence containing the information being cited. **Do not use more than one endnote per sentence;** if necessary, combine several sources in one note. A bibliography of all the sources used in the paper along with other useful sources may be useful or required. For this course, a bibliography is optional.

**Ellipsis:** When you want to skip some words in a direct quotation, you must indicate that words were skipped by inserting an ellipsis (plural = ellipses), which is three dots with spaces between them and before and after them. If the words skipped are at the end of a sentence, place a period after the last word and then add the three dots, with a space before the three dots and close the parentheses.
immediately after the final dot. Here is an example using the sentence above: “When you want to skip some words . . . you must indicate that words were skipped by inserting an ellipsis, which is three dots. . . .”

**Honor Code Policy:** Quizzes, tests and examinations. No help may be given or received by students when taking quizzes, tests, or examinations, whatever the type or wherever taken, unless the instructor specifically permits deviation from this standard.

1. **Course Requirements:** All work submitted to fulfill course requirements is to be solely the product of the individual(s) whose name(s) appears on it. Except with permission of the instructor, no recourse is to be had to projects, papers, lab reports or any other written work previously prepared by another student, and except with permission of the instructor no paper or work of any type submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of another course may be used a second time to satisfy a requirement of any course in the Department of Public and International Affairs. No assistance is to be obtained from commercial organizations that sell or lease research help or written papers. With respect to all written work as appropriate, proper footnotes and attribution are required.

**The George Mason University Writing Center**

Robinson Hall, Room 114; Monday-Thursday, 10:30 - 6:30; Friday, 9:30 - 2:30
703-993-1200; wcenter@gmu.edu
Gateway Library Room 134L and Fenwick Library 2100 and 2302
Gateway Library Room 134L | Fairfax | Phone: 703-993-9056

**Academic Accommodation for a Disability**

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

**James P. Pfiffner** ([pfiffner.gmu.edu](mailto:pfiffner.gmu.edu)) is University Professor in the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University. His major areas of expertise are the U.S. Presidency, American National Government, the national security policymaking process, and public management.

His professional experience includes service in the Director’s Office of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (1980-81), and he has been a member of the faculty at the University of California, Riverside and California State University, Fullerton. In 2007 he was S.T. Lee Professorial fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study at the University of London. In the summer of 2013 he was Visiting Professor at the Center for Governance and Public Policy at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia.

He has written or edited sixteen books on the presidency and American National Government, including *The Strategic Presidency: Hitting the Ground Running* and *Power Play: The Bush Administration and the Constitution*. He has also published more than 100 scholarly articles and chapters in books.
While serving with the 25th Infantry Division (1/8 Artillery) in 1970 he received the Army Commendation Medal for Valor in Vietnam and Cambodia.