

Course Syllabus: Political Science 3308: The American Presidency  
Sul Ross State University: Rio Grande College  
Dr. Mark Saad Saka: Professor of History and Political Science  
Fall 2024

Dr. Mark Saad Saka: Garner Field Road Office 102  
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Office Hours by Appointment

**Course meeting times:** We will meet on Thursdays from 6:00-8:45.

**Course Description:** This course involves studies in the nature and growth of executive power, an analysis of the many faceted roles of the President, and attention to the types of performances of different individuals in the office.

**Required Texts:**

\*Sidney Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776-2021* 9<sup>th</sup> edition. ISBN # 978-1-0718-2461-0

**Primary Learning Objectives**

At the successful conclusion of this course, through performance on short written assignments, papers and a final examination, the student will be able to

- Demonstrate knowledge about the history of the Presidency and its important personalities; the key institutions of the executive branch; the key powers of the executive branch; constitutional issues relating to the Presidency and the exercise of presidential powers; and the role of the executive branch in implementing public and foreign policy
- Exercise critical thinking skills and demonstrate informed judgment in evaluating issues and answering questions relating to the exercise of Presidential power, and the President's broader role in our constitutional structure.
- Improve and build on writing skills.

**Marketable Skills for Political Science** • Students can effectively communicate ideas and information verbally, visually, and in writing • Students can distinguish between

credible/relevant information and information lacking credibility/relevance • Students can identify critical and common institutions of political decision-making and policymaking across different nation-state settings • Students can engage with social and political problems and use critical thinking to develop logical solutions

### **Course Requirements:**

- 1. Weekly reading summaries (25%):** Each week, you will be required to write an approximately 2page summary of the weekly reading assignments. These assignments will require you to locate and elaborate on the key points and issues contained in the readings. You may exercise your own discretion in presenting these assignments, or you may answer the corresponding questions that appear below. **Please turn in these assignments through Blackboard.** A total of 10 short assignments will be due for this course.
- 2. Long Paper 1 (Chapters 1-7) (25%):** In 3-4 formal written pages, explain what the framers had in mind in creating the office of the President and summarize the evolution of the office of the Presidency up to 1900. What did the framers hope the President would be able to do? What were their concerns? Did any of these concerns prove to be correct as the office of the President evolved through the next century? **Please turn in this paper through Blackboard.**
- 3. Long Paper 2 (Chapters 8-14) (25%):** In 3-4 formal written pages, summarize the evolution of the Presidency from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1900) to the present time. Has the Executive Branch become the most powerful of the three branches of government? If so, explain how. What were the key turning points in the evolution of the Presidency over the past century? Has the strengthening of this office been a positive development for the nation? If yes, explain. If not, explain. **Please turn in this paper through Blackboard.**
- 4. Final Examination (25%):** The final examination will consist of 100 multiple choice questions. These questions will be drawn and my lectures. Please indicate the correct answer in Microsoft Word using the bold or highlight feature and submit to Blackboard. You will be given two opportunities to take the test. On the first opportunity, I will indicate which questions you answered incorrectly. You will then have a second opportunity to answer the questions correctly.

**Grading Methodology:** The weekly reading summaries will be evaluated on a 10-point scale (100 points total). The short papers and final examination will be graded on a 100-point scale. 90-100 (A) 80-89 (B) 70-79 (C) 60-69 (D) <60 (F)

At the end of the course I will add up your potential points (100 for the weekly reading assignments, 100 for Long Paper One; 100 points for Long Paper Two, and 100 points for the

multiple choice final exam) for a total possible number of points of 400. 360-400 (A); 320-359 (B); 280-319 (C); 240-279 (D); <239 (F)

**Plagiarism on any written assignment will result in an automatic grade of “0” for the assignment and may result in disciplinary action from the university.**

**ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act):** SRSU Disability Services. Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. RGC students seeking accessibility services should contact Paulette Harris, Executive Assistant to the Vice President and Dean, at 830-279-3023 or email [pharris@sulross.edu](mailto:pharris@sulross.edu). Ms. Harris’s office is at 2623 Garner Field Road, Uvalde, TX 78801 (this is the mailing address, too).

**Distance Education Statement:** Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university’s academic support services, library resources, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website. Students should submit online assignments through Blackboard or SRSU email, which require secure login information to verify students’ identities and to protect students’ information. The procedures for filing a student complaint are included in the student handbook. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website.

### **Course Outline**

**August 29-Introduction to course, syllabus review, The intellectual roots of the presidency, the British and Colonial American roots of the presidency-**

**Sept. 05-The Constitutional Convention and Creation of the Presidency** (read chapters one and two in your textbook)

### **Short Paper 1-(due Sept. 12)**

Write a summary/engagement paper at your own discretion, or answer the following questions in short essay format: Why did the Constitutional framers believe the nation needed an Executive Branch? What were the competing proposals for an Executive Branch, which proposal prevailed, and why?

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**Sept. 12: Bringing the Constitutional Presidency to Life: George Washington and John Adams 1788-1800** (read chapter 3 in your textbook): **The Triumph of Jeffersonianism: Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe 1800-1824**, (read chapter 4 in your textbook)

**Short Paper 2 (due Sept. 19)**

To what extent did Presidents Washington and Adams succeed in meeting the expectations of the framers, and to what extent and in which respects did they deviate from these expectations? How did political factionalism shape the early American Presidency? How did foreign policy shape these early American presidency?

Write a summary/engagement paper at your own discretion or answer the following questions in short essay format: What did Thomas Jefferson mean when he later wrote that his election in 1800 represented “as real a revolution in the principles of our government as that of 1776 was in its form.” Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? Your answer should reflect on Jefferson’s vision for our national government at the time of his election in light of the later accomplishments and challenges of his Presidency.

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**Sept. 19-The Age of Jackson: Andrew Jackson to James Buchanan 1828-1860** (read chapter 5 in your textbook)

**Short Paper 4 (due Sept. 26)**

The Aftermath of Jefferson; Andrew Jackson

Write a summary/engagement paper at your own discretion, or answer the following questions in short essay format: What is meant by the term “Jacksonian democracy?” What does this term reveal about the “Age of Jackson?” What does it obscure, or to what extent is deceptive? How did Jackson’s election inaugurate a fundamental change in American political culture? What legacy and challenges did Jackson leave for his immediate successors?

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**Sept. 26: The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln: 1860-1865** read chapter 6 in your textbook)

**Short Paper 5 (due Oct. 03)**

Write a summary/engagement paper at your own discretion, or answer the following questions in short essay format: The chapter begins with the statement: “Abraham Lincoln was the last nineteenth century president to make an important contribution to the theory and practice of the executive.” Elaborate on the statement. What were President Lincoln’s accomplishments? What challenges did he face? Was he able to expand the powers of the Presidency without compromising the Constitution? Why or why not?

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**Oct. 03: The Reaction against Presidential Power: Andrew Johnson to William McKinley 1865-1900)** (read chapter 7 in your textbook)

**Short Paper 6 (due oct. 10)**

Write a summary/engagement paper at your own discretion, or answer the following questions in short essay format: Is it fair to say that Presidential power subsided in the aftermath of the Civil War? Why or why not? Why might there have been an aversion to Presidential power during this period? Was a seemingly absent (or at least aloof) President to the benefit of the nation during this transformative period? Why or why not?

**Long Paper One also due on October 10: Long Paper 1 (Chapters 1-7) (25%):** In 3-4 formal written pages, explain what the framers had in mind in creating the office of the President and summarize the evolution of the office of the Presidency up to 1900. What did the framers hope the President would be able to do? What were their concerns? Did any of these concerns prove to be correct as the office of the President evolved through the next century? **Please turn in this paper through Blackboard.**

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**Oct. 10: Progressive Politics and Executive Power: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson, 1901-1920:** Read chapter 8 in your textbook)

**Short Paper 7 (due Oct. 17)**

Write a summary/engagement paper at your own discretion, or answer the following questions in short essay format: What did the term “Progressivism” mean at the beginning of the twentieth century and what was the relationship between Progressivism and the relative expansion of Presidential power from roughly 1901-1920? To what extent did foreign policy challenges (American imperialism, the First World War) shape the Presidency during this period?

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**Oct. 17: The Consolidation of the American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Dwight Eisenhower 1932-1960** (read chapter 10 in your textbook)

**Short Paper 8 (due Oct. 24)**

Write a summary/engagement paper at your own discretion, or answer the following questions in short essay format: To what extent did each of the following events permanently alter the power, reach and scope of the Executive Branch: The Great Depression, The New Deal and the Cold War?

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**Oct. 24: Personalizing the Presidency: John F. Kennedy to Jimmy Carter 1960-1980)** (read chapter 11 in your textbook)

**Short Paper 9 (due Oct. 31)**

The Presidency in the Postwar Period; Write a summary/engagement paper at your own discretion, or answer the following questions in short essay format: To what extent did the relative prestige and power of the Presidency rise from 1960-1980? What new challenges did the Presidency face during this period, and why is it sometimes argued that the power and prestige of the office declined?

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**Oct. 31: A Restoration of Presidential Power: Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Bill Clinton 1980-2000** (read chapter 12 in your textbook)

**Short Paper 9 (due Nov. 07)**

The Triumph of Ronald Reagan Assignment: Write a summary/engagement paper at your own discretion, or answer the following questions in short essay format: What was meant by the term “Reagan Revolution?” Do you think this term is accurate in describing the Reagan Presidency? What did modern conservatism come to mean as a result of the Reagan Presidency? In what respects were there tensions in the conservative ideology under the Reagan Presidency and was Reagan able to resolve these tensions? Why or why not? Did Reagan contribute to or detract from the prestige of the Presidency?

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**Nov. 07: George W. Bush, Barak Obama, and Unilateral Presidential Power 2000-2016** read chapter 13 in your textbook)

**Short Paper 10 (due Nov. 14)**

How did George Bush and Barak Obama dramatically increase the centralization of Presidential Power and the growth of the Federal State? How did foreign policy play a role in this centralization of the unilateral president? How did domestic economic factors play a role?

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**November 14: Donald Trump, Joseph Biden and the Struggle for a Peaceful Transfer of Power: The Vice Presidency** (read chapter 14 and 15 in your textbook)

**Long Paper 2 due Wednesday Nov. 21, Long Paper 2 (Chapters 8-14) (25%)**: In 3-4 formal written pages, summarize the evolution of the Presidency from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1900) to the present time. Has the Executive Branch become the most powerful of the three branches of government? If so, explain how. What were the key turning points in the evolution of the Presidency over the past century? Has the strengthening of this office been a positive

development for the nation? If yes, explain. If not, explain. **Please turn in this paper through Blackboard**

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**The Final Examination of 100 multiple choice points must be submitted to Blackboard no later than 11:59 pm, Thursday December 5, 2024.**