

Presidential Decision Making
POLS 4360
Spring 2009

Professor Joe Giammo
Unique Number: 10197
Room: Ross Hall 215
Time: T, Th, 10:50 – 12:05 p.m..

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Office Hours: M, W, F, 11:00 – 12:00 noon,
T, Th, 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.,
or by appointment

Overview:

This class will examine the factors that influence decisions made by presidents, including an examination of the relevant circumstances, processes, constraints, and resources that help to shape those decisions. The course is broken into two distinct segments. The first half of the class will involve a discussion of a model of decision making, covering a variety of topics through readings by a variety of authors. These discussions will be designed to give you the tools necessary to analyze and evaluate presidential decisions. The second half of the class will focus on the application of that model to specific cases. The class will conduct a simulation in which students will participate in addressing a hypothetical crisis. We will then turn to historical examples of important decisions made by recent presidents, with discussions led by specific groups of students.

Requirements:

Students are expected to arrive on time, to participate in class discussions, and to complete all readings by the assigned dates. There is no textbook for this class. Assigned readings, or links to them, if they are available on the internet, will be posted on the course web page through WebCT.

Additionally, students are expected to read a daily newspaper, watch a daily news broadcast, or follow an internet news source. The source that you choose is entirely up to you, however, we will often discuss current events, particularly as they relate to decisions made by the president.

Grading:

Your grade will be determined by a weighted average of one exam, one analytical essay, one group presentation, class participation, and participation in an in-class simulation (with related assignments), calculated as follows:

Midterm Exam – 30%
Essay - 35%
Simulation Assignments – 10%
Presentation – 15%
Class Participation – 10%

The midterm exam will consist of short answer and essay questions and will cover information from both lecture and readings. You will not be allowed to talk or use notes or books when taking the exam. No make-up exams will be given except in cases of serious, documented emergencies. Since I will be the sole judge of what constitutes such an emergency, your best policy would be to check with me beforehand. If that is not possible, you are responsible for contacting me as soon as possible after the exam. Students taking the make-up exam will not be given the same exam assigned to the rest of the class, and the format of the make-up exams may vary. More details about the other assignments will be forthcoming.

Letter grades will be based on the traditional scale (90-100 is an A, 80-89 is a B, 70-79 is a C, etc.). There will be no opportunities for extra credit

Attendance Policy:

While attendance does not play a direct role in calculating your grades, it will have an impact on your participation grade and, of course, your ability to complete the simulation will require your attendance during those class periods. Additionally, students missing class will find it very difficult to keep up with the material. The material presented in lecture will overlap with, but not be limited to the information presented in the assigned readings. In fact, several topics covered in lecture are not mentioned at all in the readings. Therefore, students who miss class will have trouble answering many of the questions on the tests, and their grades will naturally suffer accordingly. In fact, it is extremely unlikely that students who frequently miss class will be able to pass the course.

Academic Dishonesty:

Academic dishonesty, which includes, but is not limited to cheating on an exam, unauthorized collaboration on an assignment, and plagiarism, is taken very seriously in this course. Students who commit such actions will be reported to the Dean of Students and may receive an F for the course. If you have any questions about whether an action is considered to be academically dishonest, please see me or read the complete description of the UALR policy on academic dishonesty, which is available in the student handbook at www.ualr.edu/www/handbook/student_rights.html.

Disability Support Services

It is the policy of UALR to accommodate students with disabilities, pursuant to federal law and state law. Any student with a disability who needs accommodation, for example in arrangements for seating, examinations, note-taking, or access to information on the web should inform the instructor at the beginning of the course. The chair of the department offering this course is also available to assist with accommodations. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Support Services, which is located in the Donaghey Student Center, Room 103, telephone 501-569-3143 (v/tty), and on the web at www.ualr.edu/dssdept.

Course Format:

This is a seminar class, and thus should consist of more class discussion than lecture. The reading load for the class is not particularly heavy, and I expect you to come to class prepared to discuss the ideas and arguments presented by the authors whose work you will read, and to apply those ideas and arguments toward constructing a broader model for understanding and evaluating decisions that presidents make. Student questions and observations are always encouraged. Politics is by its nature a matter of considerable disagreement and strong opinions, and students should feel free to express their own viewpoints, even when the subject is a sensitive one. I fully expect you to disagree with each other and with me on a variety of topics. In fact, class discussions are much less interesting or useful when everyone seems to agree with each other. While healthy disagreement and discussion is encouraged, it should always, however, remain on a respectful and professional level.

General Policies:

Students who are having difficulty with the course or who wish further clarification on a particular topic from lecture or the readings should feel free to see me during my office hours or to schedule an appointment with me to meet at another time. You may also e-mail me, and I will try to get back in touch with you within one business day of your contact. Under no circumstances should you contact me at home.

In order to facilitate a better learning environment, distractions need to be kept to a minimum. Therefore, you should turn off your cell phones before the start of each class. Additionally, you should not bring children with you to class.

WebCT

Additional information, documents, and course announcements will be available through the course web page. You can access the web page at <http://webct.ualr.edu/webct/public/home.pl>

Course Outline and Assignments:

All dates subject to change

Date	Topic	Reading Assignment
January 13	Introduction	
15	Modeling Presidential Decisions	Edwards and Wayne, Ch. 7
20	Context and Goals	
22	Constraints – Constitutional and Legal	The U.S. Constitution, Federalist 69
27	Constraints – Resources and Commitments	Shuman, Ch. 2
29	Information, Uncertainty, and Decision Making	Downs, Ch. 5 and 6

February 3	Information – Intelligence Gathering	9/11 Commission Report, pp. 74-82, 86-93, and 400-419
5	Information – The Bureaucracy	Wilson, Ch. 11 and 14
10	Information and Advice	Buchanan Chapter
12	Bargaining and Persuasion	Neustadt, Ch 3
17	Bargaining and Persuasion	
19	Other Actors – Congress and the Courts	Jones, Ch. 6
24	Other Actors – Public Opinion and Interest Groups	Kingdon, Ch. 3
26	Other Actors – Allies and Adversaries	Oye Reading
March 3	Identifying Alternatives and Making a Choice	Kingdon, Ch. 4
5	Exam	
10	Simulation	
12	Simulation	
17	Simulation	
19	Simulation	
24 and 26	Spring Break – No Class	
31	Simulation Debriefing	
April 2	No Class	
7	Discussion #1	Summary Readings
9	Work in Groups	
14	Discussion #2 – Group A	Summary Readings
16	Discussion #3 – Group B	Summary Readings
21	Discussion #4 – Group C	Summary Readings
23	Impact of Presidential Decisions	
28	Evaluating Presidential Decisions	
30	Course Conclusions – Papers Due	