

**POL 220: The Presidency**  
**Spring 2026 (Syllabus Version: 1/13/2026)**  
**Manchester 121: T R 5:00p-6:15p**

Dr. Justin Esarey  
Professor of Politics  
E-mail: [esareyje@wfu.edu](mailto:esareyje@wfu.edu)

Office: 319 Kirby Hall  
Phone: 678-383-9629  
Fax: 336-758-6104

Book an Office Hours Meeting: <https://calendar.app.google/YekNaM3fasJz2sNg8>

**COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

This course introduces students to the workings of the executive branch of the federal government, including and especially the presidency. The course will address theories of executive power, the electoral politics of the presidency, presidential staff management, the president's role in federal policy-making, and bureaucratic politics.

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to read, understand, summarize, and evaluate social scientific research concerning the American presidency.

**GRADING POLICIES AND ASSIGNMENT DETAILS**

**Grade Components:**

- Discussion Group Responses 20%
- Small Group Participation: 10%
- Midterm Exam: 35%
- Final Exam: 35%

**Grading Scale:**

100%-93%: A	82.9%-80%: B-	69.9%-67%: D+
92.9%-90%: A-	79.9%-77%: C+	66.9%-63%: D
89.9%-87%: B+	76.9%-73%: C	62.9%-60%: D-
86.9%-83%: B	72.9%-70%: C-	>59.5%: F

**Small Group Discussion:** Everyone in class will be randomly assigned to a small group. Each group must meet and discuss the discussion questions. Grading for this assignment is 100% or 0% based on attendance and active participation in the discussion. The grade will be assessed by your peers; after each meeting, your group will indicate on Canvas who meaningfully participated in the discussion and those who did so will receive full credit. Ten missed attendances for the Small Group Discussion will be dropped; the rest will be averaged to form this portion of the grade.

**In-Class Discussion Responses:** At the beginning of class, a *new question or activity* (one that has not been distributed in advance) will be distributed. You will have a set amount of time (typically between 10 and 20 minutes) to meet in class with your small

group and formulate a response together. You may use your notes and printouts of assigned readings, but *you may not use any internet resources (including generative AI programs such as ChatGPT)*. Your group will submit a single response, under the names of all group members who participated; this will be graded. Students who are not present will receive a zero for that day's response. The ten lowest discussion response grades for each person will be dropped; the rest will be averaged to form this portion of the grade.

**Attendance:** Regular attendance is typically a prerequisite for success in the class, although no points are deducted because of an absence alone. Anything taught in class is testable material, and not everything I teach in class is guaranteed to be in the course reading material.

**Exams:** There will be two exams in this class, a midterm and a final. All exams are cumulative but will focus on material learned after the last exam. Exams will be taken in class and are designed to be completed in one hour. *Class notes, readings, and textbooks may be consulted during an exam. No other materials may be used. No one except Dr. Esarey may be consulted during an exam, and no internet sources (Wolfram Alpha, ChatGPT, StackOverflow, etc.) may be consulted.*

### **ASSIGNMENT POLICIES**

1. **Discussion responses and small group participation credits MAY NOT BE TAKEN LATE OR RESCHEDULED, including due to short-term illness or one-off academic or scholarly activities. Ten missed responses/group meetings, corresponding to over 35% of class meetings, are already dropped from the grade to account for these circumstances.** Exceptions to this policy will only be made in unusual circumstances on a case-by-case basis. If you develop a severe illness that you believe will interfere with your ability to complete more than a few discussion responses or small group discussions, please contact Dr. Esarey immediately.
2. **Students will not receive credit for discussion responses unless the student attends the full class period. If a student comes to class to complete the discussion response and then leaves, they will receive a zero.**
3. **Assignments are due at the date and time I specify for the assignment.**
4. **Failing to take the exam during the scheduled time window will result in no credit for the exam.** Exams may be re-scheduled only under the following three circumstances:
  - a. a death in the immediate family (parent, spouse, sibling, or child) within two weeks before the exam due date;

- b. an unforeseeable and significant illness or medical emergency affecting you, your spouse, or your child; or
- c. participation in a Wake Forest-sponsored academic or sporting event.

In the event of (a) or (c), you must give me **at least 24 hours advance notice and preferably more** (via e-mail or a phone call) that you will miss the exam, or it may not be made up. I may require supporting documentation. All penalty waivers are at the discretion of the instructor. Under these circumstances, I will extend your due date and/or schedule a make-up exam time. **Conflicts with a work schedule, job interview, non-academic trip, or vacation are not a valid reason to miss an exam or any other assignment** and cannot be the basis for a penalty waiver.

### OTHER COURSE POLICIES

**Honor Code/Academic Misconduct:** All forms of academic misconduct will be handled according to the Wake Forest University Honor Code. Details on the Honor Code are available at <https://studentconduct.wfu.edu/honor-system-wfu/>.

If you ever have any questions about what you should do to stay within the honor code on a particular assignment, *contact me with your question and I can assist you*. I cannot guarantee a timely response unless you contact me at least 24 hours in advance of the time the assignment is due.

**Statement on use of Artificial Intelligence Resources:** Students must treat receiving assistance from artificially intelligent computer programs (such as ChatGPT or WolframAlpha) in the same way that they would treat receiving assistance from a human being. Any assistance that would be treated as a violation of the Honor Code if performed by a person will be treated as a violation of the Honor Code if it is performed by a computer program. Some illustrative examples:

1. Uploading discussion questions to ChatGPT and asking it to draft answers for you *is a violation* of the honor code (plagiarism).
2. Writing your own answer to a discussion question and uploading this to ChatGPT to ask for improvements in grammar or clarity *is not a violation* of the honor code as long as the written work remains substantially your own.
3. Using ChatGPT, WolframAlpha, or any other artificially intelligent system for any kind of assistance on an exam or quiz *is a violation* of the honor code (a form of cheating: it violates the rules against getting help from anyone except Dr. Esarey).
4. Uploading a section of a reading assignment to ChatGPT and asking it to explain the concept to you in different words *is not a violation* of the honor code, as long as you do not use its description verbatim in a submission of written work.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you have a disability and require accommodation in this class, please contact me as soon as possible (within the first two weeks of class) to

discuss these accommodations. You will also need to contact the Disability Services Office (telephone extension: 5929) in 118 Reynolda Hall. More information is available at <https://lac.wfu.edu/disability-services/>.

**Syllabus Change Policy:** All policies of this syllabus may be changed by Prof. Esarey with advance notice.

## **COURSE MATERIALS**

### **Required Texts:**

- Sullivan, E. Thomas, and Richard W. Painter. 2025. *The U.S. Presidency: Power, Responsibility, and Accountability*. Available online from ZSR at <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009521970>.

Other readings are downloadable from Canvas and/or freely available online.

• **COURSE OUTLINE AND ASSIGNED READINGS**

Date	Topic	Readings
1/13	Course Overview	
1/15	The Scientific Study of the Presidency	Morris, Irwin L. 2010. "Science and the Study of the Presidency." Chapter 2 in <i>The American Presidency: An Analytical Approach</i> : 18-55.
1/20	Institutional Background	Sullivan and Painter, Chapter 1: "The Vesting of Executive Power." pp. 11-61.
1/22	Presidentialism and State Stability	Linz, Juan J. 1990. "The Perils of Presidentialism." <i>Journal of Democracy</i> 1(1): 51-69.
1/27	Veto Players	Tsebelis, George. 2000. "Veto Players and Institutional Analysis." <i>Governance</i> 13(4): 441-474.
1/29	Is Presidential Governance Destabilizing?	Mainwaring, Scott, and Matthew S. Shugart. 1997. "Juan Linz, Presidentialism, and Democracy: A Critical Appraisal." <i>Comparative Politics</i> 29(4): 449-471.
2/3	The Influence of the President on the Public	Wise, Stephanie. 2025. "The Public Consequences of Presidential Legitimacy Rhetoric." <i>Social Science Quarterly</i> 106(2): e13490.
2/5	The Influence of the President on the Economy	Wood, B. Dan, Chris T. Owens, and Brandy M. Durham. 2005. "Presidential Rhetoric and the Economy." <i>Journal of Politics</i> 67(3): 627-645.
2/10	The Influence of the Public on Policy Making	Canes-Wrone, Brandice. 2015. "From Mass Preferences to Policy." <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i> 18: 147-165.
2/12	Personal Popularity and Presidential Electoral Success	Wattenberg, Martin P. 2004. "Personal Popularity in U.S. Presidential Elections." <i>Presidential Studies Quarterly</i> 34(10): 143-155.
2/17	Economic Performance and Presidential Electoral Success	Healy, Andrew, and Neil Malhotra. 2013. "Retrospective Voting Reconsidered." <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i> 16: 285-306.

2/19	Forecasting the 2024 Presidential Election	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tien, Charles, and Michael S. Lewis-Beck. 2024. "The Political Economy Model: Presidential Forecast for 2024." <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i> 58(2): 248-252.</li> <li>2. Saeki, Manabu. 2025. "Forecasting Popular Vote and Electoral College Vote Results: Partisan-Bounded Economic Model." <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i> 58(2): 267-273.</li> <li>3. Enns, Peter K., et al. "Understanding Biden's Exit and the 2024 Election: The State Presidential Approval/State Economy Model." <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i> 58(2): 298-305.</li> </ol>
2/24	The President's Domestic vs. Foreign Policy Influence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wildavsky, Aaron. 1998. "The Two Presidencies." <i>Society</i> 35(2): 23-31.</li> <li>2. Canes-Wrone, Brandice, William G. Howell, and David E. Lewis. 2008. "Toward a Broader Understanding of Presidential Power: A Reevaluation of the Two Presidencies Thesis." <i>Journal of Politics</i> 70(1): 1-16.</li> </ol>
2/26	The Executive Branch	Sullivan and Painter, Chapter 2: "The President and the Administrative State." pp. 62-74.
3/3	Why Did the Presidency Surrender Patronage Powers?	Theriault (2004). "Patronage, the Pendleton Act, and the Power of the People." <i>Journal of Politics</i> 65(1): 50-68.
3/5	Separation of Powers and the Quasi-Independent Bureaucracy	Shepsle, Kenneth, and Mark Bonchek. 1997. "Bureaucracy and Intergovernmental Relations." Chapter 13 in <i>Analyzing Politics</i> , pp. 345-379.
3/10	No Class: Spring Break	
3/12	No Class: Spring Break	
3/17	Presidential Appointments and Personnel	Lewis, David E. 2011. "Presidential Appointments and Personnel." <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i> 14:47-66.
3/19	The Growth in Presidential Staff	Dickinson, Matthew J. 2005. "Neustadt, New Institutionalism, and Presidential Decision-Making: A Theory and Test." <i>Presidential Studies Quarterly</i> 35(2): 259-288.
3/24	Presidential Staffing and Politicization	Lewis, David E. 2005. "Staffing Alone: Unilateral Action and the Politicization of the Executive Office of the President." <i>Presidential Studies Quarterly</i> 35(3): 496-514.
3/26	More Presidential Staffing and Politicization	Kinane, Christina M. 2021. "Control without Confirmation: The Politics of Vacancies in Presidential Appointments." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 115(2): 599-614.
3/31	The President and Congress	Sullivan and Painter, Chapter 4: "The President in the Lawmaking Process." pp. 117-129.

4/2	Congressional Oversight	Shipan, Charles R. 2004. "Regulatory Regimes, Agency Actions, and the Conditional Nature of Congressional Influence." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 98(3): 467-480.
4/7	Congressional Influence on the Bureaucracy	MacDonald, Jason A. 2010. "Limitation Riders and Congressional Influence over Bureaucratic Policy Decisions." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 104(4): 766-782.
4/9	Congressional Oversight Revisited	Lowande, Kenneth, and Rachel Augustine Potter. 2021. "Congressional Oversight Revisited: Politics and Procedure in Agency Rulemaking." <i>Journal of Politics</i> 83(1): 401-408.
4/14	The President as Commander in Chief	Sullivan and Painter, Chapter 3: "The President as Commander in Chief." pp. 75-116.
4/16	Electoral Influence on Foreign Policy	Aldrich, John H., et al. 2006. "Foreign Policy and the Electoral Connection." <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i> 9: 477-502.
4/21	Presidential Rhetoric and Diversionary Foreign Policy	Keller, Jonathan W., and Dennis M. Foster. 2016. "Don't Tread on Me: Constraint-Challenging Presidents and Strategic Conflict Avoidance." <i>Presidential Studies Quarterly</i> 46(4): 808-827.
4/23	No Class: MPSA Conference	
4/28	The (un)Accountable Presidency	Brettschneider, Corey, and Aidan G. Calvelli. 2024. "The US Presidency: Power and Constraint." <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i> 27: 205-222.