



POLI 3519 (Winter 2026): The American Presidency

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Introduction: The American President holds a position which is heavily scrutinized within the United States and around the world. On the one hand, the President is seen as wielding tremendous power which can influence nations and peoples across the globe. On the other hand, the President's ability to make changes to the United States' own domestic and foreign policy is often seriously limited by the other branches of the U.S. government. These disparate assessments of the power of the President may well accord with the vision of the U.S. founders. Their debates about how to set up an energetic and yet limited executive illustrate that they aimed to bring about presidents who could present a strong and unified presence to foreign nations and yet be relatively restrained domestically. However, as several important books over the years have documented, the domestic power of the president as a kind of tribune of the people has certainly modified that original foundation. In this class, we will consider the constitutional foundations of the presidency and the debates about executive power, trace the development of the presidency since that time, and assess the office as it stands today.

Required Text (e-text available through the bookstore; our lectures will provide links to supplemental readings):

The Lost Soul of the American Presidency by Stephen F. Knott (University Press of Kansas, 2019) available at the Lakehead bookstore for \$46.99 or an ebook is available at VitalSource for about \$21.59

Requirements:

1. **Contributions to class discussions** (40%): You will be asked to respond to one or more questions every week based on our readings, viewing, and lectures. In addition to providing your own response, you will also be asked to comment on at least two classmates' responses and encouraged to follow up on each other's responses. As you are in a third-year course, the expectation is that you can take the lead in seriously considering the questions and themes introduced. Your contributions to the discussions will be assessed at about halfway through the course and a progress grade will be offered. ***Use of any outside materials or aids are discouraged, but if you choose to use some, they must be fully cited.***
2. **Essay** (due: March 27th; 30%): Information about this requirement will be supplied in lecture early in the term. This assignment will offer an opportunity for you to display an ability to engage in political science research and make sound arguments of your own supported by that research.
3. **Final Exam** (30%): Your responses to questions about course themes, people, and events. More information about this requirement will become available later in the term.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Expand knowledge of the nature and historical development of the U.S. presidency.
2. Develop an ability to find and assess various scholarly sources.
3. Strengthen your ability to think critically about information presented by both traditional and nontraditional media.
4. Assess present developments in the office of the American Presidency and their effects both domestically and internationally.

Topics and Readings:

Each lecture will provide detailed slides, notes and/or other media links as well as supplemental primary and/or secondary readings

1. **January 8:** An introduction to the course and requirements.

READ: *The Lost Soul of the American Presidency (LSAP)*, Introduction.

2. January 15: The Founders and the Presidency

READ: **LSAP**, Ch. 1

3. January 22: The Popular President

READ: **LSAP**, Chs. 2 & 3

4. January 29: The Presidential Mandate

READ: **LSAP**, Chs. 4 & 5

5. February 5: The Imperial Presidency

READ: **LSAP**, Chs. 6 & 7

6. February 12: The Road to Degradation

READ: **LSAP**, Chs. 8 & 9

7. February 26: Presidential Character

READ: ***Lecture will provide links to readings/viewing.***

8. March 5: Commander-in-Chief

READ: ***Lecture will provide links to readings/viewing.***

9. March 12: Limits on Executive Power

READ: ***Lecture will provide links to readings/viewing.***

10. March 19: The Legacy of Lincoln

READ: *Lecture will provide links to readings/viewing.*

11. March 26: The Legacy of Trump, Biden, and the Fate of the American Presidency

READ: *LSAP*, Ch. 10

12. April 2: Review and Exam Assignment Information (no assigned reading)

Academic Honesty: Academic honesty is expected of all Lakehead University students. It should go without saying that cheating, collusion, and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students are expected to make themselves fully familiar with Lakehead's policies in this area. Although all these policies will be enforced in full, it is worth emphasizing the following:

PLAGIARISM INVOLVES PRESENTING ANOTHER'S (including AI) WORK, IDEAS, THEORIES, OR INTERPRETATION AS ONE'S OWN.

To avoid plagiarism, always:

- 1) Put quotation marks around any words taken from sources.
- 2) Paraphrase material completely; do not simply rearrange words from a source or change them using a thesaurus, etc.
- 3) Whether it is being quoted or paraphrased in your work, always give accurate and complete citations for all material that comes from another source.
- 4) Avoid borrowing entire arguments or ideas from another writer. Your arguments should be original to you.