College of Professional Studies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Civic Foundations and the American Presidency

Course Number: PMGT 4200
Course Instructor(s): Dr. Anthony Eames
Course TA: Ava Cusey
Credits: Three credit course that meets twice per week
Class Meetings: Wednesdays 4:30pm–7:00pm, Fridays 9am–12pm
Semester/Year: Summer 2026
Meeting Location: 850 16th Street, NW and various locations in Washington, DC

"Leadership is not only having a vision, but also having the courage, the discipline, and the resources to get you there"
– George Washington

"The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things."
– Ronald Reagan

Course Introduction: Examine and Engage

Welcome to Civic Foundations and the American Presidency. This course begins with a conviction that understanding the American presidency requires a thorough investigation of its constitutional design, its development across two and a half centuries, and the character of the individuals who have occupied it. Throughout history, presidents have sought to reshape the norms, privileges, and obligations of civic life to match their own vision of the republic, and yet for all the power they have wielded, they too bear the equal title of citizen. To study the presidency is therefore to study ourselves, and by better understanding the office, we come to better understand the terms, the demands, and the possibilities of our own citizenship.

Your cohort has been assembled to reflect a range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. The kind of historical and civic thinking we pursue here requires the friction of honest disagreement. You will not always agree with your instructors or your peers. You are expected to engage them seriously.

Our method is threefold. We will study the presidency as an institution, tracing its origins in the Founders' constitutional debates, following its evolution across the full span of American history, and examining the enduring tensions between executive power and democratic accountability that those debates set in motion. We will encounter the office in place, visiting the historical sites in and around Washington where presidential leadership has been tested, exercised, and commemorated, and where we will learn to read those sites with a questioning eye. And we will bring the presidency into contact with the present, drawing on your own professional experiences, a roster of distinguished guest speakers, and the practical work of translating historical knowledge into policy argument and civic action.

The goal is not to produce partisans of any stripe, but citizens equipped to think historically, argue rigorously, and lead with integrity. The American experiment in self-government remains unfinished. This course is an invitation to take it seriously.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

Students will embark on a summer leadership experience in Washington D.C. enriched by the careful study of the trials and tribulations faced by the individuals who have occupied the Oval Office. This interactive course will introduce the building blocks of successful leadership through presidential case studies, interaction and access to prominent leaders, and by learning from a variety of leadership challenge scenarios.

As a result of completing this course, students will be able to:

- Apply various elements of presidential leadership to their own life.
- Develop historical thinking as a central practice of engaged citizenship.
- Partake in and facilitate civil discourse on meaningful and challenging issues in constructive fashion.
- Practice historical empathy and interrogate the political uses of history.
- Craft a coherent historical narrative and argument drawing on both primary and secondary sources.

Required Text and Learning Materials

RRI will ensure that readings are available digitally.

Course Structure and Leadership Reflection Themes

1. **Foundations:** What is the Presidency? The Institution in the Early Republic
2. **Leadership Tools and Trials:** The Bully Pulpit
3. **Leadership Tools and Trials:** Elections and Democracy
4. **Leadership Tools and Trials:** The Imperial and Impossible Presidency
5. **Leadership Tools and Trials:** Moral Leadership
6. **Leadership Tools and Trials:** The Economy
7. **Leadership Tools and Trials:** Commander-in-Chief and Crisis Leadership
8. **Legacy:** Post-Presidency

Optional Supplemental Texts and Learning Materials

- Brian Balogh and Bruce Schulman (eds.), *Recapturing the Oval Office: New Historical Approaches to the American Presidency* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).
- Joseph Bessette and Jeffrey Tulis, *The Constitutional Presidency* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).
- George C. Edwards and William G. Howell (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- Forrest McDonald, *The American Presidency: An Intellectual History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994).
- Sidney Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776–2018* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2020).
- Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

- Andy Rudalevige, *The New Imperial Presidency: Renewing Presidential Power After Watergate* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).
- Stephen Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2024).
- Jeremi Suri, *The Impossible Presidency: The Rise and Fall of America's Highest Office* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).
- Charles C. Thach, Jr., *The Creation of the Presidency: A Study in Constitutional History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1922).
- Miller Center Presidential Oral Histories
- The American Presidency Project

Evaluation and Grading

Students' grades will be based on participation and performance on assignments throughout the course. Refer to the appendices at the end of the syllabus for explanations and expectations of each assignment.

Class Participation (25%)

We are all more likely to reach our learning goals when you come prepared to engage and offer insightful contributions based on the reading and resources, your internship, and your own experiences. We recommend that you prepare questions and comments ahead of class meetings to ensure that you can participate in a meaningful way. Participation will include class attendance, constructive discussion and commentary during class, completion of feedback forms as directed by RRPFI, and additional "mini-assignments" as outlined in the syllabus and/or detailed in class. All participation requirements outside of attendance and discussion during class will be introduced in class and via email and are expected to be complete by class time the following week.

We expect that artificial intelligence will be part of your routine class preparation. During "AI summary sessions," you must be able to explain how you employed AI in your preparation and be able to demonstrate a sound understanding of the material that holds up to deeper reading and assessment.

Your feedback forms will also be part of your participation grade.

Policy Memo and Brief (25%)

Write a one to two page memo on a specific policy issue of your choosing for an appropriately specified principal. Then create a five minute oral briefing for that principal. Briefings will be delivered to the primary and supplementary instructors at the final class meeting.

Crisis Simulation (20%)

Participate in a hypothetical crisis simulation. Participants will be graded on their ability to define ideal outcomes to the crisis at hand; assess a menu of options for diplomacy, informational responses, military action, economic intervention, etc.; build and coordinate a crisis response team; establish lines of communications; manage real-time developments and intelligence; assuage public concerns; etc. A rubric will be circulated ahead of this session. Students will then submit a 2 page after-action report.

Op-Ed (20%)

This op-ed should follow on the issue addressed in your policy brief. Your Op-Ed must make a single, direct argument on a specified policy issue in 500–750 words. You are strongly encouraged to submit your Op-Ed for publication in consultation with your professors.

Presidential Leadership Symposium Reflection (10%)

Write a two-page reflection detailing lessons and takeaways from your participation in the Presidential Leadership Symposium.

Readings and Schedule

Week 1 – What is the Presidency? The Institution in the Early Republic

Wednesday, June 10 – Session One: Founding Debates
Location: RRI Building
Instructors: Congressman Glenn Nye and Dr. Anthony Eames
Readings and Resources:

- The Federalist Papers: Federalist 1, Federalist 68, Federalist 69, Federalist 70
- Article 2 of the U.S. Constitution
- National Constitution Center: Interactive Constitution App

Assignments: None

Friday, June 12 – Session Two: Presidential Leadership and the Meaning of Freedom
Location: Mount Vernon
Readings and Resources:

- Charles O. Jones, "Inventing the Presidency," in *The American Presidency: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- Eric Foner, "American Freedom in a Global Age" (American Historical Association, 2001).
- Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress: Democracy Innovation Timeline

Assignments: Week 1 Feedback Form due Sunday, June 14

Week 2 – The Bully Pulpit

Wednesday, June 17 – Session One: Finding a Presidential Voice
Location: RRI Building
Instructor: Dr. Anthony Eames
Readings and Resources:

- Diana Schaub, *His Greatest Speeches: How Lincoln Moved the Nation* (St. Martin's Press, 2021), preface and chapter 1.
- Ronald Reagan, A Time for Choosing (1964, video).

Assignments: In-class speechwriter exercise (Rewriting a Crisis of Confidence)

- Policy Memo Due at 11:59pm on June 26
- Week 2 Feeback Form due Sunday, June 21

Friday, June 19 – NO CLASS

Week 3 – Elections and Democracy

Wednesday, June 24 – Session One: Elections and Democracy
Location: RRI Building

Instructors: Congressman Glenn Nye and Dr. Anthony Eames

Readings and Resources:

- Kennedy-Nixon, first televised presidential debate (1960, video).
- Michael Genovese, *Memo to a New President: The Art and Science of Presidential Leadership* (Oxford University Press, 2007), chapters TBD.
- George Washington's Farewell Address
- Democracy Innovation Timeline (thepresidency.org).

Assignments: None

Friday, June 26 – Session Two: Elections, Transitions, and Team Building

Location: The People's House

Readings and Resources: None

Assignments: Week 3 Feedback Form due Sunday, June 28

Week 4 – The Imperial and Impossible Presidency

Wednesday, July 1 – Session One: The Imperial and Impossible Presidency

Location: RRI Building

Instructor: Dr. Tevi Troy

Readings and Resources:

- Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Mariner Books, 2004), 1973 foreword, chapter 1.
- Franklin D. Roosevelt, First Inaugural Address (1933, video).

Assignments: Week 4 Feedback Form due Sunday, July 5

Friday, July 3 – NO CLASS

Week 5 –Moral Leadership

Wednesday, July 8 – Session One: Purposes of Moral Rhetoric

Location: RRI Building

Instructor: Congressman Glenn Nye

Readings and Resources:

- Colleen Shogan, *The Moral Rhetoric of American Presidents* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 2007), introduction and chapter 5.
- Ronald Reagan, Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals ("Evil Empire Speech," 1983).
- George W. Bush, The Steel of American Resolve (2001, video).

Assignments: None

Friday, July 10 – Session Two: Moral Leadership in a Contested World

Location: Lincoln's Cottage

Readings and Resources:

- *Lincoln* (2005 film)
- Garry Wills, review of Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, *American Scholar* (Winter 2006).

Assignments:

- Week 5 Feedback Form due Sunday, July 12

Week 6 – The Economy

Wednesday, July 15 – Session One: Economic Policy and Rhetoric (AI Summary Session)

Instructors: Dr. Anthony Eames and Dr. Tevi Troy

Location: RRI Building

Readings and Resources (AI Summary Session):

- Herbert Stein, Presidential Economics: The Making of Economic Policy from Roosevelt to Clinton (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1994).
- B. Dan Wood, *The Politics of Economic Leadership: The Causes and Consequences of Presidential Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
- Presidents and the Economy selected readings (pdf)

Assignments: Op-Ed Due at 11:59pm on July 15

Friday, July 17 – Arlington House Site Visit

Location: Arlington House

Readings and Resources: None

Assignments: Week 6 Feedback Form due Sunday, July 19

Week 7 – Commander-in-Chief and Crisis Leadership

Wednesday, July 22- Session One: Crisis Management (AI Summary Session)

Location: RRI Building

Instructor: Dr. Anthony Eames

Readings and Resources (AI Summary Session):

- Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Little Brown, 1971).

Assignments: None

Friday, July 24 – Session Two: Session Two: Crisis in the Nuclear Age (Crisis Simulation)

Location: State Department, Navy Hill

Readings and Resources: NUKEMAP

Assignments: Week 7 Feedback Form due Sunday, July 26

Week 8 – The Post-Presidency

Wednesday, July 29 – Session One: Building a Presidential Legacy
Instructor: Dr. Anthony Eames
Location: RRI Building
Readings and Resources:

- Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "Rating the Presidents: Washington to Clinton," *Political Science Quarterly* 112 (1997): 179–190.
- Alvin Felzenberg, "There You Go Again: Liberal Historians and the *New York Times* Deny Ronald Reagan His Due," *Policy Review* 82 (1997).
- Reagan's Farewell Address

Assignments: None

Friday, July 31 – Session Two: Policy Briefings
Location: RRI Building
Instructors: Dr. Anthony Eames and Congressman Glenn Nye
Readings and Resources: None
Assignments:

- Policy Briefing (in class)
- Final Feedback Forms due at the end of class

Integrity and Code of Conduct

Program Norms

All students are expected to attend class and to come fully prepared to participate having read all required readings as outlined. Absences will negatively affect your participation grade.

1. ***Expect Respect. Agree to Disagree.*** A student's personal leadership journey is always accompanied by support and discourse. While we encourage students to challenge each other on substance, we expect the highest degree of respect for each other and for people's opinions.
2. ***Be a Presence.*** Attending class must be a priority for you and if it is not, this is the wrong course for you. We all encounter situations where events overtake us. In the age of technology, it is easy to become distracted and disengaged in conversations. Please minimize computer, tablet, and phone use unless it is being used to take notes or look up information to contribute to the conversation.
3. ***Anticipate Need.*** Do not come to class unprepared. We expect that you will complete the assigned reading(s) and that you will be able to summarize them and address specific issues raised in those readings when called upon in class. We expect you to have an understanding of the current leadership challenges faced by policymakers and legislators here in Washington, DC. If you need recommendations for further reading beyond what is assigned or recommended, please feel free to ask.

4. ***Contribute.*** Class participation is about what and how you contribute, not just your attendance. We expect you to read with a critical eye and consider the arguments the authors are making in their pieces. Participation is also more than asking the occasional question and thus you will be evaluated on the quality of your contribution and how it furthers the discussion. We also hope that you will share your own assessments, experiences, and analysis of the issues we are discussing. In the end you will learn as much (if not more) from your peers and colleagues as from your professors.
5. ***Seek to Understand.*** In this course, you will encounter diverse perspectives and backgrounds, whether this is from readings, guest speakers and experts, your professors, or your fellow scholars. Ask questions, rather than make assumptions. Approach topics and others with an open mind. Remember that discomfort is a sign of learning and growth.

Expectations and Responsibilities

Readings

All assigned readings are to be completed before class to participate in discussions and activities.

Attendance

There are rarely excuses for not informing the program staff, professors, or TA ahead of time. If you miss a class and it is an excused absence, you may be asked to submit an 800-word overview of the readings for that class. This will ensure you are up to date with the required readings.

Technology

During regular instruction, please minimize computer, tablet, and phone use unless it is being used to take notes or look up information to contribute to the conversation. When we welcome guest speakers or host special programs, absolutely no technology will be allowed.

Research and Grammar

Our TAs are fair but tough graders and expect your work to be the product of significant effort. This means they expect thoroughly researched, thought-through, and well-written pieces including proper grammar, correct spelling, and correct citations. Last minute work rarely meets these standards, so please plan ahead.

Communication and Feedback

Important announcements will be posted periodically via Blackboard's announcement feature throughout the course. The instructor will strive to reply to student questions within 24 hours and provide feedback for assignments within a week after the due date.

Student Privacy

In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974, GW's student privacy policy prohibits the disclosure of information contained in a student's educational records to third parties without the express written consent of the student or former student.

Credit Hour Policy

For this 8-week, 3-credit course, students are expected to spend a minimum of 100 minutes of out-of-class work for every 50 minutes of direct instruction, for a minimum total of 14 hours a week. A 3-credit course should include approximately 14 hours of direct instruction and of independent learning. More information about GWU's credit hour policy can be found at the Office of the Provost's Policies web page (Under: Assignment of Credit Hour Policy).

Course Prerequisites

None

Blackboard Site

A Blackboard course site has been set up for this course. Each student is expected to check the site regularly throughout the semester to review weekly course content, view announcements, and submit assignments. Students can access the course site through GWU Blackboard.

This Blackboard course may have additional support individuals enrolled as Teaching Assistants, to include individuals such as the Program Director or Instructional Designer. The role of these individuals in the course site is to support faculty members and help ensure a positive and effective course experience for students.

Support for Blackboard is available at 202-994-4948 or the IT Blackboard web page.

Please note that your access to this course on Blackboard will continue for one month after the course ends. If you wish to keep any work or materials, you must download or save them before the course closes.

Technology Requirements and Expectations

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the required technology to fully participate in this course. The minimum technology requirements for learning online at GW are outlined on the Technical Requirements and Support web page.

GW is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment that is accessible for everyone, including people with disabilities. Please review GW's Digital Accessibility statement for more details.

Regarding technology skills, you should be able to:

- Create documents and presentation slides
- Use a webcam and microphone
- Use a digital camera or scanner
- Upload files, including recordings and images
- Be open to learning and registering for new technologies
- Be flexible when technological glitches happen (which is a given)
- Seek technological help when necessary by contacting the Division of Information Technology

If you have any problems with the technology expectations in this course, please contact your instructor.

University Policies and Services

Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity is an integral part of the educational process, and GW takes these matters very seriously. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, utilize generative artificial intelligence in an unauthorized manner, and in other ways outlined in the Code of Academic Integrity. Students accused of academic integrity violations should contact the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) to learn more about their rights and options in the process. Outcomes can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the university, including a transcript notation. For more information, please refer to the Office of Academic Integrity website, email (rights@gwu.edu), or call (202-994-6757).

Accommodations

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services. They can be contacted by phone at 202-994-8250 or in person at Rome Hall, 801 22nd Street, NW, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Counseling and Psychological Services

GW's Colonial Health Center offers counseling and psychological services, supporting mental health and personal development by collaborating directly with students to overcome challenges and difficulties that may interfere with academic, emotional, and personal success. For additional information call 202-994-5300 or visit the Counseling and Psychological Services website.

Copyright Statement

Course materials generally represent the intellectual property of course instructors, which may not be disseminated or reproduced in any form for public distribution without the written permission of the course instructor. Published course readings available in Blackboard are copyrighted material and may not be further disseminated without permission of the copyright owner.

Religious Holidays

Students must notify faculty as early as possible, but no later than three weeks prior to the absence, of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. To the greatest extent possible, faculty must continue to extend to these students the courtesy of absence without penalty on such occasions, including permission to make up examinations.

Title IX Statement

The George Washington University and its faculty are committed to creating a safe and open learning environment for all students. If you or someone you know has experienced sexual harassment, including sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, and stalking, please know that help and support are available. GW strongly encourages all members of the community to take action, seek support, and report incidents of sexual harassment to the Title IX Office at 202-994-7434 or at titleix@gwu.edu.

Bias-Related Reporting

Acts of bias, hate, or discrimination are anathema to the university's commitment to educating citizen leaders. We strongly encourage students to report possible bias incidents. For additional information, please visit Bias Incident Response.

Safety and Security

- In an emergency: call GWPD at 202-994-6111 or call 911
- For situation-specific actions: review the Emergency Response Handbook
- In an active violence situation: Get Out, Hide Out, or Take Out
- Stay informed: review notification tools for staying informed during emergency and safety-related situations

The Writing Center

The Writing Center is located in Gelman Library at 2130 H St NW in Suite 221 and can be reached at 202-994-3765 or at gwriter@gwu.edu. You can schedule writing center appointments, both in-person or by phone, in advance. The Writing Center does offer Summer hours.

GWU Libraries

Off-campus students have full access to all of the research resources, services, and assistance that the Library offers. The GW community has access to 500+ online subscription databases and to millions of items, electronic and print, in the library catalog. For more information visit the GW Libraries homepage or call the Ask Us desk at 202-994-6048.

Grading Scale

Following is the grade scale for all CPS classes:

Grade	Range	Grade Standard

A	94–100	Your work is outstanding and ready for submission in a professional environment. Your material, effort, research, and writing demonstrate superior work.
A-	90–93	Represents solid work with minor errors. Overall, excellent work.
B+	87–89	Very good. Represents well-written material, research, and presentation, but needs some minor work.
B	83–86	Good work, but needs reworking and more effort.
B-	80–82	You have completed the assignment, but you are not meeting all of the requirements.
C+	77–79	Needs improvement in content and in effort. Shows some motivation and concern.
C	73–76	Needs reworking, improved effort, and additional research. Shows minimal motivation and concern.
C-	70–72 (lowest grade to pass)	Poor performance. Major errors, too many misspellings, problems with accuracy, etc.
F	Below 70	Unacceptable performance, or inability to submit the assignment.

Netiquette

Please observe the following rules of netiquette for communicating online:

- Remain professional, respectful, and courteous at all times.
- Remember that a real human being wrote each post and will read what you write in response. It is easy to misinterpret discussion posts. Let's give the benefit of the doubt.
- If you have a strong opinion on a topic, it is acceptable to express it as long as it is not phrased as an attack. Please be gracious with differing opinions.
- When upset, wait a day or two prior to posting. Messages posted (or emailed) in anger are often regretted later.
- Proofread and use the spell check tool when you type a post. It makes the post easier to read and helps your readers understand what you are saying.

Your instructor reserves the right to delete any post that is deemed inappropriate for the discussion forum, blog, or wiki without prior notification to the student. This includes any post containing language that is offensive, rude, profane, racist, or hateful. Posts that are seriously off-topic or serve no purpose other than to vent frustration will also be removed.

Appendix: Policy Brief Rubric

Policy Memo and Brief (25%)

Write a one to two page memo on a specific policy issue of your choosing for an appropriately specified principal. Then create a five minute oral briefing for that principal. Briefings will be delivered to primary and supplementary instructors at the final class meeting.

More on the Briefing

Imagine your principal is about to walk into an important meeting or public engagement and must have a quick briefing on the topic you have chosen. This briefing should allow your principal to have a high-level knowledge of the topic with a few key details and should enable them to answer questions accurately.

Policy Brief Rubric (25 Points)

6. **Preparation (5 points):** Briefing and briefing materials are in order and ready to deliver as soon as you interact with your principal. Immediately capture your principal's attention. Be able to answer questions and provide additional resources if requested.
7. **Prioritize (5 points):** Establish key decision and talking points up front. State your recommendation early on. Restate your recommendation at the close of the briefing.
8. **Structure (5 points):** Tell them what you're going to tell them. Briefing is organized in a manner that allows your principal to easily absorb and analyze the information presented. Ensure there is adequate time for your principal's questions and feedback.
9. **Confidence Factor (5 points):** How do you know what you know? How certain are you that you are providing sound information and analysis in your briefing?
10. **Equities and Effects (5 points):** Outline the key constituencies, audiences, and groups that will be impacted and informed by the decision made by the principal. Note first order effects; follow with second and third order effects (time permitting).