

## **POLS 3301 Seminar on First Ladies Syllabus, Fall 2010**

Course Location: Tuesdays, 1:00-1:30 pm, RH 215 and 1:40-3:30pm SUA 102D

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Hours: Tuesdays 10:50-11:15 and 12:15-12:45 pm; and by appointment, in person or online. Please use BlackBoard e-mail so I can keep all of your messages and attachments securely saved and organized. Your Blackboard mail shows up in my Blackberry, so I'll know to get back to you asap.

### **Course Description**

This seminar surveys US first ladies as actors in the context of their times and in terms of the evolution of the office of the first lady as an entity within the Executive Branch. Thus this class is about the first ladies as individuals as well as the office they occupy and, by extension, about the presidency. If you have not taken POLS 1310 American National Government, be sure to get an introductory textbook (used is fine) and review the presidency chapter: you need to know this language in order to understand the assigned readings and presentations for this class.

We take a multidisciplinary perspective on these first ladies and the firstladyship, including political science, history, mass communications and rhetoric, and gender studies. While we will all read scholarly articles from Watson's reader (see below), students also have the opportunity to read a scholarly article in their home discipline or branching out into a different discipline and its approach to understanding first ladies.

As an upper level course, in this seminar we will work with (free) argument/concept mapping software ,MS Word, MS Excel, MS PowerPoint, and MS Publisher to enhance our writing and critical thinking skills. Usually we will use these programs in the smart classroom SUA D during the second half of class; occasionally to complete your assignments, you will need to use UALR computer labs or have this or comparable software on your personal computer.

### **Assigned readings**

You should finish all readings before class; at the very least, you should scan the readings in order to understand and contribute to what we do in class. What you get out of any class is a function of what you put into the class. In addition to the two required textbooks, you also will have assigned readings for the assignments you choose to fulfill your grade requirements (see below).

## Required textbooks

Robert P. Watson, *The Presidents' Wives: Reassessing the Office of the First Lady*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999. ISBN 978-1-55587-948-8

Robert P. Watson and A. J. Eksterowicz, eds. *The Presidential Companion: Readings on the First Ladies*, 2nd ed. University of South Carolina Press, 2006, ISBN 978-1-57003-659-0. [Flyer about this book]

## POLS Learning Goals relevant to our class

**Knowledge Goals** – students majoring in political science will be exposed to a wide range of substantive information about the world of politics, covering subjects such as:

- ❖ The history, characteristics, and impact of political institutions – *the first ladyship* -- and systems, including international, national, state, and local governments
- ❖ The behavior of individual actors – *the first lady* -- at both the mass and elite levels

**Skill Goals** – students majoring in political science will develop practical and marketable skills which will help them to apply that knowledge to any number of career paths. These skills, which will be developed in our written and oral assignments (see below), include:

- ❖ Critical thinking – the ability to read and evaluate primary texts, ideas, theories, and political analysis
- ❖ Analysis/Research – the ability to pose and answer questions effectively
- ❖ Argumentation/Persuasion – the ability to use logic and evidence to build a persuasive argument
- ❖ Written and Verbal Communication – the ability to communicate ideas clearly on paper or through oral presentations

## Class format

My teaching style combines short explanations of course content/analytical methods with hands-on applications in which students complete research exercises, worksheets, and reflective writing in class or as assignments for the next class. Thus, you need to have processed assigned readings before class in order to participate in these (graded) learning activities. We use a computer-equipped classroom for these activities and usually submit them during class; you are also welcome to bring a laptop to class.

## Bring to class

Bring your textbooks and assigned materials since we will usually have a "hands-on" activity. Also bring a flash drive or CD-RW disk to class so you can save copies of your work.

## Assignments and components of your grade

Required elements are marked with an asterisk\*; all students must complete these requirements. For an additional 35% of your grade, you may select any combination of alternative assignments. The alternative assignments are the ones listed below that do not have an \*. You might, for example, write one research paper (30%) and presentation of research paper to the class (5%); or you could write another scholarly article review (15%) and write a biography review (20%). Any combination of alternative assignments that adds up to at least 35% of your grade will be acceptable.

By the third week of class, each student will submit and get approval for their alternative assignment contract. If you select the research paper option, you must write and get my approval of your research design. Due dates will be mutually agreed upon for alternative assignments; like dates for required assignments, these will be firm deadlines and late alternative assignments will not be accepted. Therefore you need to think carefully about your schedule for the semester as you choose the alternative assignments you want to complete and the deadlines by which you will complete them.

## Components of your grade \* = required component

Attendance*	5*
Midterm Exam*	15*
Scholarly Article Review and Presentation, from Watson & Eksterowicz *	10*
In class writing assignments* (may drop two assignments)	10*
Powerpoint or Brochure comparing 2 First Ladies* present in class and hand in Nov. 16	12*
First Lady Biography Review	20
First Lady Video Review	10
Scholarly Article Review (alternative assignment)	15
Research paper, using documentary evidence, including pre-approved research design	30
Class presentation of review, article, book or paper	5
Final Exam*	13*

All assignments must follow written guidelines that are available in Blackboard. Examples of published reviews are also posted in Blackboard to illustrate the tone, style, and content students should use in these assignments. Because each assignment represents a certain kind of technical and/or scholarly writing students are learning how to master, these guidelines must be followed. Grading rubrics for each assignment are based on the guidelines, so failing to adhere to them will negatively impact your grade. Moreover, leaving out a section of an assignment creates a gap in that cannot get points; missing

sections of assignments get zero points. Similarly, extra sections that students add in to an assignment cannot get points.

I use a standard grading scale: 90-100 = A, 80-89 = B, 70-79 = C, 60-69 = D, below 60 = F. I do not curve grades. I only round grades up if the average is very, very close: an 89.4 is still an 89; an 89.8 or an 89.9 could round to a 90 if there is an improving trend in grades across the semester or if only one "bad" grade is pulling this average down.

Violations of Academic Integrity (see UALR policies in Blackboard) are not tolerated. Cheating in any form, including cheating on an exam or plagiarizing a paper, will result in an F (grade of 0) on that assignment; a second violation will result in a grade of F for the semester grade and expulsion from the class.

### **Missed classes and missing class work**

Since our class meets once per week, attending each class is extremely important for your success. The formula I use for calculating attendance grades is: 100 = 0 absences, 95 = 1 absence, 90 = 2 absences, 85 = 3 absences, 80 = 4 absences, 75 = 5 absences, 70 = 6 absences, 65 = 7 absences, etc. This formula allows 2 absences for a grade of A for attendance; use these absences for emergencies -- they take the place of "excused" absences.

Whenever possible, I post course materials on our Blackboard site as well as providing them in class. If you miss class, be sure to check Blackboard for assignment guidelines, handouts, powerpoint presentations, etc.

Late assignments are not accepted. To receive a grade, your assignment must be handed in at the beginning of class on the assigned day. If you know you will miss class, hand your assignment in online or bring it to the POLS office ahead of time. Missing assignments receive a grade of zero. In case of a documented emergency (a car accident, being hospitalized, etc. -- does not include being sick, having a doctor's appointment, car or ride problems, or alternative commitments), you may be able to hand in a late assignment.

### **Writing standards**

For in-class work and e-mail, standards for grammar, spelling, and style are relaxed. For formal written work that allows time for editing and re-drafting, such as our research activities and prepared essays, we will use professional style and formatting, endnotes/footnotes and references/bibliographies, and proper grammar and error-free spelling. Select a Style Manual (Chicago, Turabian, MLA, etc.) to follow for your citations and end/footnotes. To promote academic integrity, students will use SafeAssign (anti-plagiarism software) in submitting assignments for this class.

### **Civility and classroom decorum**

We cannot escape the fact that most people have quite strong feelings about the first ladies, the presidency, individual presidents, and presidential candidates. Nonetheless, we will endeavor at all times to be civil and courteous in our discussion in class and in BlackBoard communications. We will respect each other as fellow citizens and as human beings. Democracy thrives on debate and vigorous discussion, but the quality and tone of the discussion matters. As a scholarly enterprise, a class is quite different from talk radio and TV programs that aim to agitate, enrage, and inflame the viewer.

Similarly, disruptive behavior in class is not tolerated; class time is for class work: students who work on other classes, read non-class material, check email and facebook, will be warned that such behavior is not appropriate. Students who cannot stay on task in class will be asked to leave; disruptive behavior contaminates the learning environment for everyone else and violates everyone else's rights.

### **Cell phones**

If you must keep your cell phone on for emergency purposes, sit near the door so you can exit the classroom easily. Otherwise, cell phones should be turned off during class.

***UALR policies, including Academic Integrity and Disability, are listed separately in Blackboard.***