

# Occidental College

## Spring 2023 Course Evaluations

**Course:** POLS302\_0: The American Presidency

**Instructor:** Isaac Hale \*

### 1 - 1. How would you describe your level of engagement in this course? How did you engage in class? For example: Did you come to class prepared? Did you seek help from the instructor, peers, or other supports when needed?

**Response Rate** 14/19 (73.68%)

- This class was very engaging & has a nice mix of lecture as well as time to have class discussions.
- I had a good level of engagement but towards the end of the semester I stopped doing the readings.
- Always came to class prepared, rarely sought help. I engaged when I felt necessary, but not over the top
- I was very engaged in this class, but I'd often not complete the readings.
- I was engaged in the class. I did not always complete the reading assigned, but I turned in all important papers and participated in class frequently.
- I was engaged in this course and felt prepared and comfortable to contribute in class.
- I engaged a moderate amount. I always came in prepared, and took part in class discussions. This class is very discussion-friendly when it comes to course topics.
- I consistently came to class prepared and participated in classroom conversations/discussions.
- I stayed engaged with this class. I kept up with the readings and came to class ready to discuss. I really liked how Prof. Hale scheduled discussion time in; it made the 1h30min class fly by.
- I would say that I was very engaged in this class as I found the course material interesting and really enjoyed the way that the class was organized.
- I tried to participate when I knew the answer or during the group discussions. There were definitely people who dominated the conversation but if I wanted to participate I was always able to do so. I came to class almost always having read all the readings. There were a few times where there were multiple long ones assigned so I wasn't always able to finish them.
- I engaged in the class by frequently sharing my views and comments during discussion.
- I came to class prepared, having done the readings and assignments. I felt the workload was very manageable, and was less than I expected. I went to a few office hour appointments, but I did not feel like I needed much help in the course.
- Students always had access to the necessary readings to participate in class. The assigned reading briefs encouraged in-class participation. The group discussions enabled students to speak in class, ask questions, and provide their input on the topics at hand. The required assignment to co-lead three discussions throughout the semester helped me participate in class and engage directly with the content.

### 2 - 2. How did this course influence, change, or help shape your understanding of the subject matter?

**Response Rate** 14/19 (73.68%)

- This class has a focus & then went in-depth & expanded on it. Prof Hale is very knowledgeable about the subject & answers questions very well.
- I understand elections a lot more now and I hate them more.
- I learned much about the behind the scenes of the presidency and the White House specifically
- This class gave me a ton of information about elections and I learned a lot about presidential elections and the institutional presidency.
- I really enjoyed the academic approach to understanding political strategies. I also enjoyed the "all-encompassing" approach to the Presidency as an institution.
- This course exposed me to new readings and materials that helped change my understanding of this subject matter.
- This course helped me understand the frustrating dynamics of checking the powers of the president. It helped me grasp truly how powerful the presidency is.
- This course vastly increased my knowledge of American institutional politics. While my research interests lie outside of the realm of institutional politics, this course actually made me interested in learning about the presidency and electoral systems. Hale provided some fascinating readings regarding the determinants of presidential elections and voting behaviors that directly challenged my understanding of both of these subjects.
- I had a very basic understanding of the subject matter before this class from POLS 101 and high school gov classes. I feel I have learned a lot about the institution of the presidency through this class, from primaries to executive orders. I did, however, think I would learn more about individual presidents through this class. But, since it is not a history class, that makes sense and I am not mad about it.
- This course gave me a much more in-depth understanding of this course matter. While I had an understanding of politics and elections before this class, the course gave me a far more nuanced understanding that will shape how I view them moving forward in helpful ways.
- This course really helped me understand the ins and outs of the presidency. I didn't really know a lot coming into the class but coming out of it I feel way more confident.
- The course helped me practice and learn how to have conversations and debates with people about the subject, while opening my mind to new dimensions of the subject through educational/scholarly sources.
- I feel that I gained a more technical knowledge of the gridlock issues that plague politics today. I also feel like I understand more in-depth the specific unilateral powers of the President.
- This class was very insightful, and I have learned so much about electoral systems, campaigns, and interbranch relations.

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### 3 - 3. What skills or capacities did you expect to gain from this course? How and to what extent did the course help you to develop those skills or capacities?

**Response Rate** 13/19 (68.42%)

- I was able to strengthen my writing skills as well as learn what it is like to take an upper-division course. I was able to learn how to read academic articles & manage my time taking more intense courses.
- I now know what the win set is and how to find it in the pivotal politics model.
- I expected to learn about the president and the separation of powers, which is what the 2nd half of the course was about. I definitely learned more post spring break because it was more on what I was expecting from the class
- I expected to gain an understanding of the presidency in America, and I got exactly what I signed up for!
- I learned how to quantify and analyze various elements essential to the presidency in an academic and structured manner.
- This course was a greater deep-dive into the subject material than I had expected, and I was happy that there was lots of material to engage with in lecture and discussions.
- I did not expect much from the course initially, but I did gain a much better understanding of the presidential primary system and the interbranch dynamic of the government, and methods for the presidential decision making.
- The course required that each student lead three discussion sections over the course of the semester. This assignment not only held students accountable for having done the reading, but encouraged students to develop a concise and well spoken overview of the readings. This was great for practicing my Public speaking. Additionally, the biweekly response papers tested my ability to write concisely, which is a skill I definitely need to further improve.
- I expected to gain concrete knowledge about the presidency and how it functions, which I did. I also learned how to think and write critically about the texts this class incorporated through Prof. Hale's help and feedback.
- I gained a much deeper understanding of elections and institutions as well as the political science behind our political scene. By doing readings and then spending time discussing them, I was able to be exposed to new materials like this and then gain a better understanding of them through discussion and debate.
- I think synthesizing information and thinking critically are two very important skills that I worked on in this class. The course helped me a lot with those skills but also with remembering and connecting information.
- I expected to gain the capacity to look at and understand several different schools of thought around the presidency. I feel that I have fully gained this ability.
- This course has helped me analyze the presidency from an empirical standpoint. Although we are all consumers and exposed to different aspects of the presidency, we do not fully understand the phenomena we witness through the news or policy.

### 4 - 4. What aspects/features of the instruction were particularly effective or ineffective? What aspects/features of the course facilitated or impeded your learning? For example: How well did the professor structure class periods (e.g., discussion facilitation, group work, in-class exercises, lectures, handouts, etc), reading questions, assignments, exams, community-based work, field work, laboratory work, studio work, etc.?

**Response Rate** 14/19 (73.68%)

- I enjoyed Prof Hale style of a mix of lecture & discussion & think ii kept the class very engaged & with a good mix of teaching & learning styles in mind.
- The class discussion needed to be spicier (more fighting and provocative questions)
- I really enjoyed how the class was structured. Listening to my peers talk is something I need to work on so this class helped with that. The nice breakup of half lecture half discussion (or 2/3 lecture 1/3 discussion) was really nice and worked very well for me, and I believe others too
- I was a big fan of the discussion based aspects of the class, and I really enjoyed leading them each time I had a brief.
- I really enjoyed the professor's lectures, as they were particularly engaging. The discussions often were slightly less productive, but the Professor attempted to keep the conversation going and was mostly successful.
- Our class discussions and response papers were very effective in ensuring my engagement with the course and understanding of its materials. Office hours were also helpful and I felt comfortable asking questions of my peers outside of class hours.
- The lectures were very effective. Very clear and easy to understand. It was always well-organized, and always gave necessary and crucial information. He always facilitated the discussion where people would be able to participate while also making sure there isn't too much oversharing by a select few students.
- Hale evidently knows what he's talking, cares about his students, and cares that his students know what he's talking about. There was a lovely distribution of class time dedicated to class room discussion and lecture. Frankly, I thought this course was scheduled quite well and I commend Hale for the prep he put into this class.
- I really liked how class periods were structured. The implementation of discussion every class helped break up what could be (too) long lectures. I liked when we had a few minutes to break between discussion and lectures. I liked the response papers as they never caused too much stressed but still challenged me to think critically and engage with the texts.
- I thought the lectures were really great, fun and engaging but also very informative. I also think that the response papers were an effective way to maintain engagement throughout the semester. I liked the class discussions a lot as well, especially how the students came up with the discussion questions.
- The structure of class was very effective. I liked having the majority of it be lectures and then breaking off for discussion. I think that sometimes the class would benefit from small group discussion rather than only large group. I know for me personally, talking in front of everyone gives me a lot of anxiety so I would feel much better talking in smaller groups.
- The real life examples that Professor Hale gave to incorporate into his lectures really helped solidify my understanding. I enjoyed the news clips and interviews that we would watch. The reading brief assignments that we had to do were a little more difficult for me because it was not entirely clear what he was looking for with the guiding questions that we had to formulate for the class, and those ultimately negatively impacted my grade.
- The discussions in class felt a little forced due to the rigid structure of the discussion leader assignment. I did enjoy most of the discussions, but if there was a way to make them more free-flowing I think that would be good. The response papers were helpful for making sure I was on top of the material and, while I haven't written it yet, I like that the analytic essay has many options for topics.
- I think the in-class group discussions were especially helpful in engaging students with the material. Lectures were well-structured, relevant, and interesting. Our in-class exercises, particularly those we conducted during our pivotal politics model week, were effective in aiding our grasp of difficult concepts.

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### 5 - 5. What aspects of the course or instruction helped or hindered the creation of an inclusive learning environment that is responsive to, and promotes the success of, a diverse group of students?

**Response Rate** 11/19 (57.89%)

- I think this class was awesome, I wish there were more women in it!!
- Discussions, obviously, encourage an inclusive learning environment so that was huge. I don't think anything really hindered the environment at all
- The professor was very helpful in terms of answering student questions related to or adjacent to the material covered. The class environment felt fun and safe. The addition of small 3 minute breaks towards the end of semester really helped me feel more engaged towards the end of the year.
- Allowing students to choose their own articles to respond to in our round table discussions went a long way in making the environment more inclusive and interesting. These discussions were also welcoming to students with different viewpoints and were enjoyable to engage in.
- Nothing hindered the classroom environment.
- The discussion sessions we held always felt very judgment free and, in general, Hale did a great job of facilitating a friendly, open, and engaged classroom environment.
- Prof. Hale helped the creation of an inclusive learning environment by always letting everyone speak during discussion, even if it caused the class to run a little bit behind schedule. I appreciated this because it allowed me to hear a myriad of viewpoints over the course of the class.
- Group discussions and reading briefs fostered a very inclusive learning environment that gave everyone a chance to ask and answer important questions and have their voice heard
- Prof Hale was always willing to answer any questions that I had and was very helpful if I got confused on something.
- Having all of the students lead three class discussions about a reading was effective at creating an inclusive learning environment.
- Professor Hale is always very accessible during office hours and lectures. He addresses all questions and concerns thoroughly when brought to his attention. With the class culture specifically, I often felt like the class required extensive background knowledge of presidents, elections, and campaigns. Oxy provides a diverse group of students with various learning backgrounds. Discussions were always lively and interesting because students hold extensive background knowledge on the topic. Sometimes I felt like I was falling behind because I did not know basic presidential facts not directly brought up in the course but related to the content. I do wish I had previous knowledge about previous elections. My lack of background knowledge kept me from participating to the extent I would have liked to.

### 6 - 6. What other suggestions (if any) do you have for the next time the course is taught?

**Response Rate** 13/19 (68.42%)

- I wish there was more small group discussion as it would've allowed me to meet other students in the class more & possible become closer with them.
- I have no suggestions. I think my complaints probably are unique to me, I think the actual structure and way the course is taught is great
- I would have enjoyed some group projects instead of an essay for the final.
- The breaks helped break up the pacing of the class and left me feeling less exhausted at the end.
- I appreciated the splits between lecture and discussion, which were well-managed and benefitted from having 5-minute breaks in between.
- Honestly, more lecture time.
- None at all!
- None! Prof. Hale is awesome.
- I do not have any recommendations, great class
- I think that small group discussion would be beneficial as well as not having discussion every single class. Sometimes it feels like I learn more when Prof Hale lectures.
- I would change the format of the reading briefs, perhaps having them be more collaborative.
- I was not expecting a full half of the course to be about presidential elections. Having worked on a campaign before, this section of the class was repetitive information for me, but I still enjoyed the discussions on the subject. I would have hoped the class focused a little more on the structural aspects of the presidency, how Presidents run their white houses (we did a few class periods on this topic, which I really enjoyed), and the technical aspects of the bureaucracy.
- Prof. Hale is a great professor. I think it'd be helpful to provide some simple resources for background knowledge and trivia.

### 7 - 7. What else (if anything) would you like to share about the course or the instruction?

**Response Rate** 11/19 (57.89%)

- Professor Hale is awesome & very knowledgeable. He is an understanding & kind professor & I've enjoyed every class I've taken with him!! Thank you Professor Hale!
- I liked this class a lot I heart professor hale
- I have no further comments
- I really enjoyed prof. Hale!
- Thank you for a wonderful semester!
- Even though I came into this course with a lot of background knowledge, I enjoyed my time and definitely felt like I left with much more than I entered.
- Thanks to Hale for an amazing last semester :)
- None! Prof. Hale is awesome
- Professor Hale is easily one of my favorite professors from my experience in this class. Each class was engaging and interesting even when I found the material a bit dry (nothing against the class design, I just get tired of numbers sometimes) I walked away from each class having laughed and learned something, which is not something I can say for many other classes. I genuinely hope to work with Hale in the future and cannot praise him enough for how well the class was run, how engaging he was, and how much the students enjoyed him.
- Prof Hale has a very engaging way of lecturing that I think is a great skill that keeps all of his students engaged. You can tell he cares a lot about what he is talking about and that makes the students care more too. Also I think it says something that everyone is always excited to sign up for his courses and that they're always full!
- I enjoyed the class and Professor Hale was the perfect instructor for this course. He made the class something to look forward to every week!