

Occidental College

2025 Spring General 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	12/17 (70.59%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The course was pretty engaging. It had "discussion times" that were well done every course and helpful. The professor is a funny and engaging professor. Engaged! My level of engagement in this class was good - I made sure to come to class prepared (doing the readings assigned and studying for weekly quizzes). I did not seek much help from peers, but went to office hours when I had questions. I would say I came to class prepared and engaged with the subject mater. I would say this course was the perfect balance of rigorous but achievable. If i missed even one reading it somehow always seemed to tank me on the quiz, which i appreciate because it actually made me do every single reading after I found out the hard way. Theres really no getting out of doing the readings and i really like that. Although those Howell readings take foreverrrrr I think I had a high level of engagement. I engaged with readings and in class discussions. I was very engaged and prepared. Whenever I didn't understand a concept, I always asked for help. Out of all four of my classes this semester, I was the most engaged in this one. I completed all readings every class, and was highly interested in participating as well. I would go to office hours when I felt myself confused or struggling. I was highly engaged throughout the course, and was constantly prepared for each class. I did all the readings, participated regularly, etc. I love this subject, so I always tried to stay engaged. Answering questions, participating, etc. made me feel this way. I was engaged in this course, I did the readings each class and attended office hours when needed. 	

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

Response Rate	12/17 (70.59%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It improved it because I learned a lot of specific history and institutional parts of the presidency that are helpful to know for politics students. I learned a lot about the executive branch. This course changed my perspective on the structure of the American presidency entirely. Before, I was not super familiar with the institutional approach, especially how it applied to today. This course shaped my understanding of presidential power given the institutions they inherit and shape. I appreciate how Prof hale put the presidency into a very contextual form. i think maybe i was expecting to just feel depressed and only talk about trump, but prof consistently reminded me that this is just the way things go in american politics and in the grand scheme of things its par for the course. It expanded it greatly. I gained a deeper understanding of the subject. Especially in this political era, it's so important to know how the executive branch works. I barely knew anything beforehand and would just acknowledge that something was unconstitutional, now I can actually understand and identify why something is. This course significantly altered my fundamental understanding of modern American Democracy and helped shape my current understanding of the state of checks and balances and the separation of powers enumerated in the Constitution. I believe that Professor Hale is one of the best professors I have had the opportunity to have learned from, and I would encourage every student at Occidental to take one of his classes. It helped me understand the development of the power of the presidency as an institution beyond ideological frameworks. Ex: Presidential power is centralized during wartime. It helped me take a more institutional approach to the Presidency, rather than just treating it like a political history class. I think that was extremely important for me, as it allowed me to approach the topic more academically. This course completely shifted my perspective on the American presidency and functioning of the US government. It was fascinating to learn about the presidency from an institutional perspective and i appreciated how we were able to tie what we were learning to current events. 	

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	11/17 (64.71%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I expected to learn about the American presidency. I did. I learned how to better analyze the executive branch. I expected to gain a better understanding of the influences on the functioning of the modern presidency (21st century). The readings in this course, especially the ones in the textbook, broadened by view of this vastly. I expected to learn about the American Presidency, I think that occurred. I kinda wish we had 2 essays at like 7 pages (double spaced) each rather than one 6 single spaced.... not a gripe perse but i feel like I still dont really know how to write this style of essay and now im sorta thrown into for the final heavily weighted big essay. Being able to do two, get feedback on the first and then understand what areas in this specific field of writing needs improvement. Not a big deal but i do wish we had more polysi style essay practice!! argumentative, persuasive, recalling information I expected to gain a deeper understanding of the systems in place and how it affects the other branches. I expanded my time management and test taking skills with the amount of readings. I also got better at having facilitated discussions with my classmates. From this course, I expected to improve my writing ability while learning about the American Presidency, including the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial Branches of government. This course helped shape my essay writing ability along with my critical thinking skills because of the course's requirements to critically examine the state of the current federal system and how the presidency has amassed great power since the inception of the Constitution, far greater than what was initially supposed to be given to the Executive Branch. This was an introduction to Constitutional Law for me - closely reading the text of the Constitution and delineating vagueness where it exists, intentionally or not, and parsing through interpretive arguments where appropriate. Learning more about the complexities of the executive branch. This class allowed me that full scope which I found very important. 	

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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	11/17 (64.71%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective: Funny professor, good presenting, being able to discuss day-to-day news in great detail, etc... Ineffective: Page count required on the paper, it would be better to remove it and let students write a paper however long they think it should be. • I felt like the class structure was effective - the combination of lecture and discussion/debate worked well for me as a learner. I also thought the no-technology rule in class helped me focus better and take better notes (despite having to handwrite). • I liked the interactive nature of the lectures. • PERFECT lesson plan STRUCTURE, super communicative, helpful in office hours. Always time to ask questions. • in class discussions, light hearted jokes • The lectures were very effective. • The fact that we had quizzes enforced that all students did the readings and were engaged in class + conversation. • I believe that the weekly quizzes were one of the most effective tools for constant engagement within the course. Because of the regularity of the quizzes in the course it encouraged students to come to class prepared every day and have a deeper understanding of the material which fostered a better learning environment for the class as a whole as it meant that every person came to class prepared to build off each others understanding of the material. I also thought that the way the class would overview the required reading and then examine it at a deeper level provided an additional level of reinforcement of the information, which became increasingly helpful as it came time to write the paper for the course. • I thought it was effective - slides were simple, readings were digestible, lectures were engaging. • the quiz structure allowed me to study the readings and lecture more in depth. The quizzes were straightforward, which allowed me to take in the content more, rather than just trying to remember content I didn't care about. • I thought classes were well structured. Each class was primarily lecture based but we often started off with current events, tying the topics of the course into the news of the day. many classes also includes breakout discussions which were a nice change of pace and effective way to engage with the material that we were learning. Sometimes, I found that the lecture moved very quickly and I had a hard time keeping up with my note taking. For me this was occasionally frustrating as I felt I was unable to process the material as quickly as we were moving through it. 	

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	11/17 (64.71%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as above. • N/a • Professor Hale was very accommodating with my academic flexibility I was granted in the latter half of the semester - we worked together with deadlines, and that helped me a lot. • I thought the environment was inclusive and was inclusive to diverse groups. • prof always took questions no matter if we were running low on time so that all voices could be heard, lectures are clear and accesible regardless of your level of competency. All around very inclusive • more room for diverging opinions • The open discussion element helped create a. good environment. • Nothing. Everything was extremely inclusive. • I think that this course had no impact that hindered the creation of an inclusive learning environment. • Professor Hale certainly maintains his neutrality, for better or for worse. All ideologies are accepted in his class, which absolutely fosters an inclusive learning environment, though I will say that I think there are moments in teaching this course/covering current events where neutrality just wasn't appropriate. • It always felt inclusive. Lots of opportunity to speak! 	

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

Response Rate	8/17 (47.06%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I liked the course and being able to write funny essays, but having a page requirement is a recipe for a bunch of fluff that has nothing to do with the topic at hand. Keep teaching the same content. It's really interesting! • N/a • N/A • More esssay practice pleassssseeeee • None! • I have none, truly one of the best professors at Occidental. • X • Maybe too inclusive? Maybe not, but sometimes, a particular student would over-speak, which I think really hindered lecture time. No fault of Professor Hale though! 	

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

Response Rate	8/17 (47.06%)
<div><div></div><div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• The course has a great professor who should keep the same content and teach many more courses to come.• N/a• N/A• I love prof hale this class was epic and he makes me wanna be a polysi major• None!• I found the course highly engaging, and I can not wait to take another class with Professor Hale.• Further on the neutrality note: For instance, there was a point in the semester where Trump eliminated the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and we were talking about it. Professor Hale basically said "Some argue that this is necessary because there is waste and fraud in the bureau and therefore it should be eliminated, while some argue that this is a necessary institution that helps hold banks accountable when they commit financial fraud." One of those things is a fabrication pedaled by a far-right, billionaire-backed oligarchy, and one of those things is true. In an effort to not alienate potential conservative minds in the class, Professor Hale does not go the extra step to educate on the matter, and I think that's a shortcoming of his teaching strategy. It's not that I think every professor should be indoctrinating students with left-wing ideas, it's just that this is a class about the institutional presidency, and it is not an ideological claim to explain how the current administration is attacking institutions that benefit poor people.• I really enjoyed this class. Thank you!</div></div>	