

Strategic Leadership and Decision-Making PA 383E

Executive Master in Public Leadership Program
LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin

Instructor: Professor Jeremi Suri

suri@austin.utexas.edu

Offices: Online during Spring 2021.

Office Hours: By appointment.

Spring 2021

OBJECTIVES, OVERVIEW, AND COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This advanced course for students in the Executive Master program will examine how leaders formulate coherent and effective strategies for policy-making in a complex and unpredictable environment. Readings and discussions will concentrate on planning, organization, persuasion, and adaptation to changing local, national, and international pressures. The course will focus on case studies in leadership, as well as broader studies of strategic decision-making in the modern world. Students should gain a greater appreciation for what it means to be an effective strategist, policy-maker, and agenda-setter. They should also acquire a certain humility about the difficulties involved with fulfilling these often inhuman tasks.

STUDENT COURSEWORK RESPONSIBILITIES

Reading Assignments:

This course includes a significant, but reasonable reading assignment each week (usually between 200 and 300 pages.) Students are expected to read all of the assigned materials carefully and critically *before each seminar meeting*. Focus on each author's key arguments and how they relate to larger concerns and debates – how is the author trying to change the way we think about strategy, leadership and decision-making? Interrogate narrative strategies – how does the author assemble his or her argument for the purpose of convincing the reader? Pay close attention to sources – how does the author “prove” his or her point? Most important, as the semester progresses think about how the assigned readings relate to one another – how is each author responding to other leaders and observers?

Assigned Readings for Purchase by Students:

Addams, Jane. *Twenty Years at Hull-House*.

Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). **Be sure to buy this exact version!**

Leuchtenburg, William. *Herbert Hoover*.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince*.

McPherson, James. *Tried by War*.

Obama, Michelle. *Becoming*.

Suri, Jeremi. *The Impossible Presidency: The Rise and Fall of America's Highest Office*.

Wilkerson, Isabel. *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents*.

Weekly Response Essays:

Each week by **9:AM** on the **Thursday before class**, all students should post a short response essay on the course website (available through UT's Canvas Course Management Website):

<http://canvas.utexas.edu/>.

This response essay should include 3 basic paragraphs. The first paragraph should summarize the key arguments in the readings and their significance. The second paragraph should analyze how the week's readings relate to other course topics and course discussions. The third paragraph should offer the student's critical assessment of the week's readings: What was most persuasive? What was least persuasive? Which are the issues and questions that need more attention? What kind of new activities do the readings inspire?

Students are expected to read each other's weekly essays *before class*. They are also expected to comment substantively on each other's essays. The weekly essays and comments will provide a starting point for each week's class discussion.

Final Project: Group Strategy Briefings:

The purpose of this course is to prepare students to become strategic planners, ready to advise and lead large global organizations. This difficult task requires analytical sophistication, historical knowledge, and current awareness. It calls for effective team-work and persuasion of principals.

With this core purpose in mind, students will be responsible at the end of the semester for preparing a strategy briefing on the future of American national economic and security policy. Here are the guidelines:

1. Students will work in teams of 5 or 6, arranged by the middle of the semester.

2. Each team will prepare a strictly **15-minute presentation**.
3. The presentation will address the next **president of the United States**.
4. The presentation will answer the following questions:
 - a. **What are the strategic priorities for American prosperity during the next 4 years?**
 - b. How can the president bring a deeply divided country together and encourage more cooperation and respect across various divisions?
 - c. How can the president improve living standards, broadly defined, for the majority of Americans?
 - d. How can the president help Americans to feel more secure, confident, and optimistic?
 - e. What can the president realistically expect to achieve in the course of four years?
5. The teams will present their briefings in class during the last seminar meeting.
6. Based on the presentations and feedback, each team will submit a final 15-page written briefing by **Friday, April 30 at 5:pm**. Please submit final written briefings by email to: suri@austin.utexas.edu

The policy briefings will be judged by the following criteria:

1. Professionalism.
2. Attention to the requirements and demands of the assignment.
3. Quality of information.
4. Accuracy.
5. Coherence.
6. Analytical insight.
7. Usefulness.
8. Strategic wisdom.
9. Creativity.
10. Strategic Leadership.

STUDENT EVALUATION:

Weekly Response Essays and Comments	30%
Weekly Class Discussion Participation	35%
Final Project	35%

EMAIL POLICY:

Students are welcome to email the instructor at any time. I will try to respond as soon as possible, but I sometimes require a few days to answer each email.

IMPORTANT NOTE ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Students are expected to respect the LBJ School's standards regarding academic dishonesty. You owe it to yourself, your fellow students, and the institution to maintain the highest standards of integrity and ethical behavior. A discussion of academic integrity, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, as well as helpful information on citations, note taking, and paraphrasing, can be found at the web page of the Office of the Dean of Students (http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php) and the Office of Graduate Studies (<http://www.utexas.edu/ogs/ethics/transcripts/academic.html>). The University has also established disciplinary procedures and penalty guidelines for academic dishonesty, especially Sec. 11.304 in Appendix C of the Institutional Rules on Student Services and Activities section in UT's General Information Catalog.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), at (512) 471-6259 [voice] or (866) 329-3986 [video phone].

COVID Syllabus Guidance from the UT Provost

Due to COVID-19 and its attendant challenges, the UT Provost's office has required a number of announcements in each course syllabus.

Safety and Class Participation/Masks: We will all need to make some adjustments in order to benefit from in-person classroom interactions in a safe and healthy manner. Our best protections against spreading COVID-19 on campus are masks (defined as cloth face coverings) and staying home if you are showing symptoms. Therefore, for the benefit of everyone, this means that all students are required to follow these important rules.

- **Every student must wear a cloth face-covering properly in class and in all campus buildings at all times.**
- **Students are encouraged to participate in documented daily symptom screening.** This means that each class day in which on-campus activities occur, students must upload certification from the symptom tracking app and confirm that they completed their symptom screening for that day to Canvas. Students should not upload the results of that

screening, just the certificate that they completed it. If the symptom tracking app recommends that the student isolate rather than coming to class, then students must not return to class until cleared by a medical professional.

- Information regarding [safety protocols with and without symptoms](#) can be [found here](#).

If a student is not wearing a cloth face-covering properly in the classroom (or any UT building), that student must leave the classroom (and building). If the student refuses to wear a cloth face covering, class will be dismissed for the remainder of the period, and the student will be subject to disciplinary action as set forth in the university's Institutional Rules/General Conduct 11-404(a)(3). Students who have a condition that precludes the wearing of a cloth face covering must follow the procedures for [obtaining an accommodation](#) working with [Services for Students with Disabilities](#).

Sharing of Course Materials is Prohibited: No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class unless you have my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. It is a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty. I am well aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in sanctions, including failure in the course.

Class Recordings: Class recordings (if any are made) are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Violation of this restriction by a student could lead to Student Misconduct proceedings.

COVID Caveats: To help keep everyone at UT and in our community safe, it is critical that students report COVID-19 symptoms and testing, regardless of test results, to [University Health Services](#), and faculty and staff report to the [HealthPoint Occupational Health Program](#) (OHP) as soon as possible. Please see this [link](#) to understand what needs to be reported. In addition, to help understand what to do if a fellow student in the class (or the instructor or TA) tests positive for COVID, see this [University Health Services link](#).

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Seminar Week 1.

January 8

Topic: What has happened to our country?

What is the future of leadership in the United States?

Reading: Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste*, all.

Seminar Week 2.

January 15

Topic: Is Leadership Impossible?

Reading: Jeremi Suri, *The Impossible Presidency: The Rise and Fall of America's Highest Office*, all.

Seminar Week 3.

January 29

Topic: Why does gender matter?

Reading: Michelle Obama, *Becoming*, all.

Seminar Week 4.

February 5

Topic: What is Power?

Reading: Machiavelli, *The Prince*, all.

Seminar Week 5.

February 19

What is Strategy?

Reading: Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, pages 75-169, 379-89, 566-73, 617-37.

Seminar Week 6.

February 26

Topic: Lincoln as Thinker and Writer

Reading: James McPherson, *Tried by War*, all.

Seminar Week 7.

March 12

Topic: Jane Addams and International Progressivism

Reading: Jane Addams, *Twenty-Years at Hull House*, all.

Seminar Week 8

March 26

Topic: Herbert Hoover, Genius and Failed Leader

Reading: William Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover*, all.

Seminar Week 9

April 9

Topic: FDR as Visionary and Father Figure

Reading: Samuel Rosenman, *Working with Roosevelt* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), pages 1-162. **scanned text available on Canvas

Seminar Week 10

April 16

Topic: Building Enduring Leadership Capacities

Group presentations and reflections