University of Gdańsk

Subject card

Subject name and code	The Us Post-Presidency and Post-First Ladyship in American Political System, PG_00215077		
Field of study	American Studies		
Date of commencement of studies	October 2025	Academic year of realisation of subject	2026/2027
Education level	Bachelor's studies	Subject group	Obligatory subject group in the field of study Optional subject group
Mode of study	full-time studies	Mode of delivery	at the university
Year of study	2	Language of instruction	English
Semester of study	3	ECTS credits	2.0
Learning profile	academic	Assessment form	credit
Conducting unit			
Name and surname of lecturer (lecturers)	Subject supervisor	dr Iwona Świątczak-Wasilewska	
	Teachers	dr Iwona Świątczak-Wasilewska	

Lesson types							
	Lesson type	Lecture	Tutorial	Laboratory	Project	Seminar	SUM
	Number of study hours	0.0	30.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	30
	E-learning hours included: 0.0						

Learning activity and number of study hours					
	Learning activity	Participation in didactic classes included in study plan	Participation in consultation hours	Self-study	SUM
	Number of study hours	30	2.0	18.0	50

Subject objectives	The aim of the course is to familiarize students with the role of former presidents and former First Ladies in the American political system.

Learning outcomes	Course outcome	Subject outcome	Method of verification
	[AMERL3_U06] Able to communicate orally and in writing on issues related to American and British culture and literature, using specialized terminology in cultural and religious studies and literary studies.	Student is able to communicate, both orally and in writing, on topics related to U.S. political culture and the role of former presidents and First Ladies in the American political system.	[SU1] oral statement/conversation/ discussion [SU2] presentation/project/paper/ report
	[AMERL3_W07] Has advanced detailed knowledge of selected issues concerning cultural phenomena and processes in North America.	He has advanced, in-depth knowledge of selected topics related to the institutionalization of former presidents and First Ladies in American political system.	[SW2] presentation/project/paper/ report [SW5] implementation of a problem task
	[AMERL3_U03] is able to use acquired subject knowledge to identify, analyze, interpret and explain cultural phenomena and processes in North America, using concepts and methods from cultural and religious studies.	Student can apply the subject-specific knowledge they have acquired to identify, analyze, interpret, and explain political and cultural phenomena in North America, using concepts and methods from the field of political science.	[SU1] oral statement/conversation/ discussion [SU2] presentation/project/paper/ report [SU5] implementation of a problem task
	[AMERL3_K01] is ready to critically evaluate his knowledge and skills, especially in American cultural and literary studies, as well as the basic contextual knowledge of American studies concerning history, social sciences, geography, linguistics and art and English.	Student is prepared to critically assess his own knowledge and skills, particularly in the field of American cultural studies and the basic contextual knowledge required for American studies, including history, social sciences, geography, and the English language.	[SK2] presentation/project/paper/ report [SK5] implementation of a problem task
	[AMERL3_W05] Has advanced knowledge of the basic conceptual and terminological apparatus of cultural and religious studies applicable to the study of cultural phenomena and processes in North America.	Student has advanced knowledge of the basic conceptual and terminological framework in the field of political science as it applies to the study of cultural phenomena and processes in North America.	[SW4] test/exam - oral or written [SW5] implementation of a problem task

Subject contents	This course explores the institutionalization of the post-presidency and the role of presidential spouses in U.S. politics. Following the 22nd Amendment (1951), which limited presidents to two terms, the post-presidency gained importance as a distinct political institution. The course traces the evolution of the U.S. post-presidency and highlights how all post-World War II presidents remained active after leaving office, using the “residues of power” they retained. Key legislative milestones such as the Presidential Libraries Act (1955), which established presidential libraries, and the Former Presidents Act (1958), which granted pensions, offices, and staff, formalized these post-office roles. Also, Presidential Records Act (1978) was a major step in institutionalizing the post-presidency. Students will compare and contrast the post-presidential careers of selected leaders and their spouses before and after these acts and analyze how former presidents engaged in political, social, and policy activities within the broader framework of the U.S. political system, without holding formal government positions. The course also examines the public, charitable, and political roles of First Ladie, and situates them within the broader framework of modern presidential influence and legacy. I. Models of post-presidency I: The Early Presidents (Hecht, Marie B. 1976. Beyond the Presidency: The Residues of Power. New York: Macmillan.) 1. warmaking 2. peacemaking 3. running again 4. partisan politics 5. tools of the incumbents 2) Models of post-presidency II: Presidents throughout history (Belenky, Irina. 2004. “The Making of the Ex-Presidents, 1797–1993: Six Recurrent Models.” Presidential Studies Quarterly. https://doi.org/10.1111/1741-5705.00025) 1. The still ambitious 2. exhausted volcanoes 3. political dabblers 4. first citizens (analysis of presidential statements, memoirs, etc.) 5. embracers of a cause 6. seekers of vindication 3) Models of post-presidency III: Post-1945, Modern Presidents (Institutionalization of the post-presidency in the 50s: the 22 Amendment, the Former Presidents Act, Presidential Libraries Act, Presidential Libraries Act) 1. legacy protection and enhancement 2. political engagement 3. policy advise 4. moneymaking activities 5. public good deeds 6. ceremonial functions (Morgan, Iwan. “After the White House: The Modern US Post-Presidency.” In Former Leaders in Modern Democracies, 12–32. 2012.) 4. Presidents in business. Fortunato Mustella. II. The First Ladies: Models of Influence (Watson's typology, 1999) 1. full partners 2. partial partners 3. behind-the-scenes partners 4. partners in marriage 5. nonpartners II. The evolution of the Office of the First Lady (OFL) and its integration with the White House Office (WHO): 1. Eleonore Roosevelt – foundations for the OFL 2. Jacquline Kennedy and Lady Bird Johnson and the integration of the White House Office with the Office of the First Lady 3. Betty Ford 4. Rosalyn Carter 5. Hillary Clinton 6. Michelle Obama
Prerequisites and co-requisites	B2 English level.
Assessment methods and criteria	

Subject passing criteria	Passing threshold	Percentage of the final grade
theoretical test	51.0%	20.0%
preperation and presentation of a problem-based project	75.0%	50.0%
in class assignments	75.0%	30.0%

Recommended reading	Basic literature	Books and book chapters Hecht, Marie B. 1976. Beyond the Presidency: The Residues of Power. New York: Macmillan. Theakston, Kevin, and Jouke de Vries. “Introduction.” In Former Leaders in Modern Democracies, 1–11. 2012. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137265319_1 Theakston, Kevin, and Jouke de Vries. “Conclusion.” In Former Leaders in Modern Democracies, 233–249. 2012. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137265319_12 Morgan, Iwan. “After the White House: The Modern US Post-Presidency.” In Former Leaders in Modern Democracies, 12–32. 2012. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137265319_2 Theakston, Kevin. Comparative Perspectives. In After Number 10, 226–237. 2010. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230281387_10 Musella, Fortunato. Presidents in Business: Career and Destiny of Democratic Leaders. European Political Science Review 7, no. 2 (2014): 293–313. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773914000149 Journal Articles Belenky, Irina. 2004. „The Making of the Ex-Presidents, 1797–1993: Six Recurrent Models”. Presidential Studies Quarterly. Watson, Robert. “Source Material: Toward the Study of the First Lady: The State of the Scholarship.” Presidential Studies Quarterly 33, no. 2 (June 2003) . Winger, Gregory H., and Anshul Jain. “Mr. Worldwide: International Affairs and the American Post-Presidency.” Congress & the Presidency 43, no. 1 (2016): 1–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/07343469.2015.1117160 Theakston, Kevin. “Life after Political Death: Former Leaders in Western Democracies.” Representation 48(2). DOI: 10.1080/00344893.2012.683494 Schaller, Thomas F., and Thomas W. Williams. “The Contemporary Presidency: Postpresidential Influence in the Postmodern Era.” Presidential Studies Quarterly 33, no. 1 (2003): 188–200. Roberts, Jane. “Exiting the Political Stage: Exploring the Impact on Representative Democracy.” British Politics (2018). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41293-018-00091-3 McClanahan, Shaelyn M., Courtney M. Page, and Laurelin M. Weiss. “First Ladies of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries: An Evolution of the Role.” MPSA Annual National Conference, 2008. Natalie Gonnella-Platts and Katherine Fritz, A Role Without a Rulebook: The Influence and Leadership of Global First Ladies (George W. Bush Institute and International Center for Research on Women, 2017).
	Supplementary literature	Davis, Michael A. “The Post‐Presidential Years of Gerald R. Ford.” In A Companion to Gerald R. Ford and Jimmy Carter, 513–531. 2015. Brinkley, Douglas G. The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter’s Quest for Global Peace. New York: Viking Adult Press, 1998. Wilson, Edith Bolling Galt. “Actions Speak Louder than Words.” In Inventing a Voice: The Rhetoric of American First Ladies, Chapter 6. Winger, Gregory H., and Anshul Jain. “Mr. Worldwide: International Affairs and the American Post-Presidency.” Congress & the Presidency 43, no. 1 (2016): 1–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/07343469.2015.1117160
	eResources addresses	

Example issues/ example questions/ tasks being completed	The course examines how U.S. presidents continue to influence American society, politics, and culture after leaving office. Specifically, how the post-presidency and First Ladyship influence: 1) political institutions and democratic development: how the role of former presidents (&FL) has evolved from a largely private retirement to an active public institution; the changing norms surrounding political leadership in the United States; 2) modern American political culture: examines how former presidents (&FL) shape public opinion through speeches, books, charitable foundations, media appearances, and political endorsements; investigates how Americans remember and evaluate presidential legacies. 3) public memory and national identity: analyzes presidential libraries, memoirs, museums, and commemorations as sites where national history and identity are constructed. Explores how competing interpretations of former presidents reflect broader social and political debates. 4) post-presidential careers of figures such as, for example, Jimmy Carter, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump. 5) the presidency and the firstladyship in the consititution, other laws and statues 6) civil society and global influence: how former presidents (&FL) engage in diplomacy, humanitarian work, philanthropy, and international advocacy. Considers the global role of American political leaders beyond their constitutional office. 7) contemporary issues: connects historical developments to current debates on postpresidency
Work placement	Not applicable

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