

## MASTER OF THE SENATE

Johns Hopkins University  
AS.190.150, Fall 2022  
Tuesdays, 10:30AM-1PM  
Gilman 413

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*Office Hours*: Tuesdays, 9:30-10:30AM or by appointment

### Course Description

This First-Year Seminar offers an opportunity to think through the nature of political power, political institutions, and political ambition. We make our way through a single book: Robert Caro, *Master of the Senate*, an account of Lyndon Baines Johnson's dozen years in the US Senate, from 1949 to 1961. As we learn about American politics at midcentury, we will ask what has, and has not, changed between then and now.

Caro is not a political scientist. He is a writer. Like political scientists, however, Caro sets his sights on power. He understands power in a very particular way rooted in the character and ambition of individual men and women. A major goal for the semester will be to explore and critique this understanding of power. Another goal is to teach you skills of close reading and good writing. Caro is a master prose stylist. We will ask why Caro makes the choices he makes, and how they help him to tell the story he wants to tell—and how different choices might have told a different story. In ways that go beyond the particulars, then, this course aims both to address critical questions about power and those who wield it, and also to give you tools about how to read a text in context.

At some point toward the end of the semester, we'll take a field trip to Washington, D.C., to see the places that Caro describes. We will also find other times to gather together outside class as part of the FYS program.

### Required Text

Robert A. Caro, *Master of the Senate* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

You should purchase a new physical copy of this book so that you can read it on paper without digital distractions and mark it up with your notes. Bring the book to class each week. If the price (under \$20) is a barrier, let me know and we'll make arrangements.

### Office Hours

Please feel free to stop by at office hours, with no pretext required, to chat about the class or life at Hopkins. The seminar format will be new to many of you, and the college seminar format new to all of you, and I'm happy to talk more to help you along the way.

## Course Requirements

For FIVE weeks, you will write a short reaction of 1-2 pages reflecting on the week's readings. You should write at least three reactions by October 11th. No need to sign up in advance; just post.

For TWO weeks, you will instead write a paper of 4-6 pages that bring together major themes. With your fellow-paper writers, you will then give a presentation to class to kick off our discussion.

Both reactions and papers are due at 10:30AM on Monday morning (that is, 24 hours before our class meeting on Tuesday morning) to the course Google Drive. You should then read everyone's reactions before class.

You are also expected to be an active participant in class discussions, contributing to but not dominating our discussions.

To earn a SAT grade, you must complete all course requirements.

## Reactions

Before five class meetings in which you will not be presenting, write a short reaction of a few paragraphs that offers some kind of response to the reading. Be succinct. Make a clear point, and support it with evidence from the text. Think about the big issues at stake. If there are things that are confusing or that we should talk about in class, feel free to raise them. These reactions do not need to be polished but, in the spirit of the course, you should think about how to write effectively for an audience. The goal is both to make you an active reader, thinking as you go through the text what you can say about it, and to stimulate discussion by giving the presenters, and all of us, things to think about as we prepare for class.

## Papers and Presentations

Before two class meetings, write a 4-6 page paper (usual font and margins) addressing key themes in the readings. Sign-ups the first day. Give your paper a title that reflects its themes. Avoid summary. Think about what the big issues are. Build an argument about what's important and . Note that there is no single magic formula to writing a great short paper. The intellectual exercise comes precisely in thinking through the stakes in that given week's readings.

In addition, you and the other writers in any given week will begin class with a brief (no more than 15 minutes) presentation, giving some context and offering issues for us to discuss. You should meet with your fellow presenters to coordinate. Your presentations should be professional. Plan what you will say, and don't just summarize your paper or the readings. Use hand-outs or multimedia presentations, if you wish.

### Disability Accommodation

I want to make sure every student can succeed in this class. Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class must obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services.

### Academic Honesty

Cheating is wrong. Cheating hurts our community by undermining academic integrity, creating mistrust, and fostering unfair competition. The university will punish cheaters with failure on an assignment, failure in a course, permanent transcript notation, suspension, and/or expulsion. Offenses may be reported to medical, law, or other professional or graduate schools when a cheater applies.

Violations can include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments without permission, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse.

Although you are encouraged to talk about the material with other students – indeed, a successful course will stimulate frequent dialogue outside the classroom – every single word you write must be your own. You may discuss your papers with other students, but you must acknowledge any assistance you receive. For more information, see the guide on “Academic Ethics for Undergraduates” and the Ethics Board website.

### Course Schedule and Readings from *Master of the Senate*

August 30: ix-xxiv  
September 6: 3-49  
September 13: 50-105  
September 20: 109-222  
September 27: 222-350  
October 4: 353-462  
October 11: 463-557  
October 18: *EYES ON THE PRIZE* DOCUMENTARY—NO READING  
October 25: 558-684  
November 1: 685-784  
November 8: MIDTERM ELECTION—NO CLASS  
November 15: 785-894  
November 29: 895-1012  
December 6: 1015-1040