

Political Science 308 United States Presidency

Section 001

T/TH 12:30-1:45, Harris 2138

Fall 2022

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Office Hours: 318 Founder's Hall (827 W. Franklin St): Tuesday and Thursday 3:30-5:00, or by appointment, and zoom appointments too.

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[Newmann's home page with links to other course syllabi](http://www.people.vcu.edu/~wnewmann)

(<http://www.people.vcu.edu/~wnewmann>)

VCU Information on the University's Response to the Coronavirus

This is the place to find updates on university policies

Provost Syllabus Policy Statements

POLI 308. U.S. Presidency. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. A political and institutional study of the chief executive, focusing especially on the presidential personality and relations with Congress, the bureaucracy, the courts and the shaping of domestic and foreign policy.

Structure of the Class

This course will be taught in class, the old fashioned pre-pandemic way. In addition, all lectures will be recorded and placed in the Media Gallery of the Canvas site. They will also be linked to the syllabus online. The recorded lectures will be available within 24 hours of the class. I do this because even though we're trying to get back to normal, not everything is back to normal. State regulations prohibit faculty from mandating that everyone in class wears a mask; for that reason, I will be providing the recordings for people who are uncomfortable in a small classroom.

Both exams will be take home versions. I'll give more details below.

Polls and Sites with Electoral College Charts

- [Gallup Poll](#)
- [Quinnipiac Poll](#)
- [Real Clear Politics Poll tracking](#)
- [Pew Center](#)
- [Washington Post polling page](#)
- [New York Times polling page](#)
- [Wall Street Journal/NBC news polls](#)
- [CBS News polling page](#)
- [538.Com polling](#)
- [CNN polling page](#)
- [Fox News polling page](#)
- [Polling Report.Com](#)

The American National Election Studies ([ANES](#)) is a scholarly database with everything. You need to register to use it (just info; no cost), and then create a password. There is a ton here, so it may require some playing around to find what you're looking for.

Use These for References to Voting in this election and past elections

- [270 to Win](#) (info on presidential elections)
- [Dave Leip's Atlas of US Presidential Elections](#) The best info on every US presidential election and more

Sites with Coverage from All Perspectives

- [Real Clear Politics](#) links to articles from everywhere
- [Politico](#) comprehensive coverage of political events

Possibly the two most important sites that exist (These examine claims made by politicians, candidates, and pundits. Are they true or are they half-truths, or are they complete lies? It also checks media stories and official pronouncements of the president and congress)

- [Fact Check.Org](#) From the Annenberg Center at the University of Pennsylvania
- [PolitiFact.com](#) From several newspapers
- [The Fact Checker](#) From the Washington Post
- [Snopes.com](#) (fact checking and debunking urban legends and internet hoaxes that are often about politics)

Reference

- [Presidential Libraries](#)
- [Statistical Abstract of the United States](#) (US Census Bureau compilation of statistics on social and economic conditions in the US)
- [Charts on Presidential Approval Ratings](#) (from Wall Street Journal; composites of several polling organizations)

Introduction

The presidency is a huge topic. Recognizing this reality, the course will take a sweeping look at the US Presidency, arguably the single most powerful office in the history of the planet. Getting a handle on the presidency is a difficult, if not impossible job. Probably the best way to start learning about the subject is to think of the US presidency as the nexus of three streams: (1) the times -- the ebb and flow of American political culture, national trends, and international historical forces; (2) the institution -- the office and powers of the office as it has evolved from the US Constitution to the media-focused, celebrity presidency of the 1980s and 1990s; and (3) the individual -- the character, vision, strengths and weaknesses of the man or woman who occupies the Oval Office. As these three streams come together the political history of the nation is shaped. The US has been called a "Presidential Nation." It is in the office of the presidency where the US people have decided to place power time and again. In the historical grappling for power between the president and congress the US people have continually sided with the president. It is the place where we look for leadership and direction. The person who occupies that office is given a stature like no other. (Has anyone seen any monuments to senators or representatives?) The president gets too much credit when things go well and too much blame

when things go wrong. For better or worse, the president has become the embodiment of the nation, and therefore, his or her character, personal habits and infirmities become the stuff of national obsession, and national security.

The office of the president is the repository of the greatest powers in the land, not just in terms of physical power (the authority to use military force, even nuclear weapons), but moral power -- the ability to shift the ethical standards of a nation and to influence, if not define, the national mood. Our presidential elections often focus on issues of personal character, not issues of economic, social or foreign policy. We seem to be choosing not simply someone to run the country, but someone to represent us -- half-prime minister, half-monarch. Our choices seem to depend on the national mood.

We're studying politics in this class, but we want to approach it as scholars, not as partisans -- supporters of any specific political party or ideology. In this sense, when we think of how to judge a president or presidency, we should not try to define success subjectively -- in terms of individual political goals that those on one side or the other of the political spectrum might have, such as reducing poverty through government action or shrinking the size of the welfare state. Using these notions as the judgment of success would lead to endless debate about the purposes of government from a partisan point of view. We'll probably have a little bit of that, but we don't want it to dominate the course. It is better to try for some scholarly objectivity, by defining success in the following manner -- did the president achieve what he set out to do? Did the president improve the quality of US democracy? Whether you, as an individual, shared the goals of one president or another, is irrelevant to this question. Analytically, the focus should be upon how successful was any president in attaining the goals that he sets for himself, and of upholding and protecting the constitution.

By the "modern" presidency I refer to the presidency as it has been defined since Franklin Roosevelt. It is FDR who, with the help of national crises of the Depression and WWII, transformed the presidency into the focus of power that it is today. He also raised expectations so high that it is doubtful that any president can meet those expectations for any length of time. Can the job be done? That is what we will focus on during the course of the semester. We will examine the powers of the presidency, the men who have held the office, and the shifting demands that our political culture places on both the office and the individual.

We, of course, will look at how the last few presidencies operated (Bush 43, Obama, and Trump), and we'll also spend a lot of time examining how President Trump shattered some of the established norms of the presidency.

Some of the issues we will discuss include: The Presidency and the Constitution; Presidential Character; The Roosevelt Revolution; "The Personal Presidency;" Presidential Management Styles; Bureaucracy, Organizations, and Presidential Power; The "Imperial Presidency" and Foreign Policy; The White House Staff and its power; Watergate and the abuse of power; The post-Watergate Presidency; The Reagan Revolution; The President and the media; Presidential Campaigns; Expectations of the President; Image making; Shifting Coalitions in Presidential Voting; Red and Blue America; and the Trump Phenomenon.

We will also spend some time looking at the current crisis in American Democracy. In the long run, presidential power has been expanding in ways that are often seen as detrimental to the checks and balances built into the system. In essence, some think we are evolving into a system where congressional oversight disappears and presidential authority is unchallenged. President Trump challenged or obliterated long standing norms in American politics, both in terms of the tone of presidential communication and the limits to presidential power. As he

repeatedly said: [Article 2 allows him to do whatever he wants](#), and gives him “total authority.” That is terrifying. The fundamental nature of democracy rejects total authority by anyone at any time. Only dictators or monarchs have total authority. Our extreme polarization has led us to a critical juncture. If we evolve into a system where parties believe that presidents from their own party can have absolute power, while presidents of the opposition party can have no power, we are no longer a functioning democracy. I can’t emphasize enough the crisis we are facing. A majority of the members of the current Republican Party believe that the 2020 election was stolen by the Democratic Party and that Biden is not legally president. This is absolutely 100% false, but they still believe it. The certification by congress of the 2020 election was disrupted by a violent riot, during which protestors attacked and invaded the Capitol Building in search of members of congress they verbally threatened to kill. Read that sentence again, and think about that. The refusal to accept the outcome of an election and an armed attempt to stop the transfer of power are two of the hallmarks of the death of the democratic process in a country. Our continued ability to hold elections and transfer power peacefully is at risk. By the end of the semester you’ll know multiple perspectives on how we got to this unstable era in American history. It is possible that scholars writing fifty years from now might label this era “the collapse of the first American Republic.” This is what keeps me up at night. I apologize for sharing my nightmare.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be able to differentiate between and evaluate approaches to studying the presidency, particularly the historical, institutional, and character.
2. Students will be able to differentiate between and evaluate theories of the pre-modern, modern, and post-modern presidencies.
3. Students will be able to evaluate the evolution of presidential power, in the context of American history, tools of presidential persuasion, and the relationships between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches
4. Students will be able to evaluate the impact of significant presidencies, in terms of both successes and failures in presidential leadership
5. Students will be able to evaluate the relationship between political realignment and the presidency, particularly in the context of coalition formation and ideological change within the US and within US political parties.
6. Students will be able to evaluate the evolution of presidential economic policy and its central role in shaping the politics of the nation
7. Students will demonstrate the ability to research and write a paper for political science

Texts: You need to read them; you don't need to buy them. There is a lot of reading for this course, but it is fun reading. I've tried to keep the dry political science textbook style to a minimum. I've assigned mostly journalistic accounts that are entertaining and educational. The books are available at the Virginia Book Company, BookHolders, and the VCU Bookstore. Some of them may be found also at the large chain bookstores in town (Barnes and Noble) or online. You might find them there at a discount. If anyone has problems getting access to the texts, for any reason, let me know as soon as possible so you don't get too far behind in the reading. You may find these texts in other places; be sure you get an edition of the text that includes

everything that is in the edition I have assigned. I will place books on reserve as well, and let you know when that is done.

Assigned Texts:

- Fred I. Greenstein. *Inventing the Job of President: Leadership Style from George Washington to Andrew Jackson* (Princeton University Press, 2014) Available online through the VCU Library:
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/vcu/detail.action?pq-origsite=primo&docID=729943>
- Doris Kearns Goodwin. *Leadership in Turbulent Times* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2019)
- Chris Whipple. *The Gatekeepers: How the White House Chiefs of Staff Define Every Presidency* (New York: Broadway Books, 2018)
- Ronald Brownstein. *The Second Civil War* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007)
- Charlie Sykes. *How the Right Lost Its Mind* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2018)

Grading System: Grades will be determined through the following:

Exam One	<i>October 11: Placed in the Files folder of Canvas on October 10 at about 9:00 AM. Due by midnight on October 11 (as October 11 becomes October 12, but that deadline is a soft one; don't sweat an extra hour or so). Type or write the exam.</i>	30% of the grade
Research Paper	<i>Rough drafts accepted until November 17 (optional) December 1: due at the beginning of class in hard copy or emailed to me by the beginning of class.</i>	30% of the grade
Citation Assignment	<i>Initial Due Date: September 22 Final Due Date: November 17</i>	5% of the grade
Exam Two	<i>December 13: I will place the exam in the Files folder of Canvas at about 9:00 AM on December 12. It will be due back to me (emailed) by midnight on December 13 (as December 13 becomes December 14). Again, this is a soft deadline. Type or write the exam.</i>	35% of the grade

How do you calculate your grade? Use the percentages from the above table. So, if you received the following grades, you would calculate your grades in the following manner:

- Exam One: 92, at 30% of the grade; that's 92 multiplied by .30 = 27.6
- Citation Assignment, 100 at .05% of the grade; that's 100 multiplied by .05 = 5
- Research Paper: 89, at 30% of the grade; that's 89 multiplied by .30 = 26.7
- Exam Two: 90, at 35% of the grade; that's 90 multiplied by .35 = 31.5
- To get the final grade, add up all the scores: 27.6 + 31.15 + 31.5 = 90.8. Congratulations you got an A.

I give you this very detailed formula for a number of reasons. You should never be unaware of what your class average is. You can calculate it at any point in the semester. If your grade is not

what you'd like it to be, you should know, and you should come see me about it. Please don't wait to come to my office hours until after the final exam and then tell me that you're having trouble in the class. It's too late at that point; there's nothing that I'd be able to do to help at that point. But any time in the semester that you feel you are having trouble, or not doing as well as you feel you should, come talk to me. During my office hours and by appointment I am happy to talk to you about the class

Grading scale: I use a typical scale: A = 90-100; B = 80-89; C = 70-79; D = 55-69. Borderline grades are considered in the following manner.

- If your grade is 69.5, 79.5, or 89.5 or higher, then you may be a candidate for a round up to the higher grade (Notice those numbers in the sentence; do not ask for a higher grade if your average is a 68 or 78 or 88 or lower; those are not borderline averages).
- You may become a candidate if your grades are borderline and if your grades have been going up during the semester.
- That means that if you are borderline, but your last exam is lower than the previous exams (you are between a B and C, but your third exam is a C for example), you will probably get the lower grade.
- If you are borderline, and your last exam is higher than the previous exams (you are between a B and C, but your third exam is a B), you will probably get the higher grade.
- Another factor I consider is the typical grade you receive. Let's say we have three grades for the class and two are grades of B and one is a C (bad day) and your average is a 79.6, you are a candidate for receiving a B. If you have three grades and two grades are grades of C and one is a grade of B, you are probably not candidate for a round up to the next grade.
- There is no extra credit for this class. Please do not ask.

One more thing: The withdrawal date is October 28.

EXAMS: The exams are take home exams. You will have roughly two days to complete each exam. The exams will be short answer and essay. *At least one week before the exam I will put a review sheet online.* It will be linked to the syllabus below this paragraph. In general, the review sheets should be used as your study guide for the exam. The review sheet will include some terms that are from the readings only, so that you can go back and review those items from the readings. Once you have the review sheet, feel free to ask me questions about the terms. This is the best way to study for the exam. If you understand the terms on the review sheet, you can define each one and see how each one relates to the larger concepts and issues we've discussed in class, you should do just fine on the exam. How does a take home exam work?

Basics

- Midterm: Placed in the Files folder of Canvas on October 10 at about 9:00 AM. Due by midnight on October 11 (as October 11 becomes October 12, but that deadline is a soft one; don't sweat an extra hour or so).
- Final: I will place the exam in the Files folder of Canvas at about 9:00 AM on December 12. It will be due back to me (emailed) by midnight on December 13 (as December 3 becomes December 14). Again, this is a soft deadline.
- Type or write the exam.

- Either way, email me a file or pdf or even jpeg of the written answers by the deadline
- 11- or 12-point font
- One-inch margins
- Double-spaced
- Please use your name in the name of the file you send me. I'd be happiest if you named the file like this: Your name Exam 1 POLI 308 (so if it was my exam, it would be Newmann Exam 1 POLI 308)
- The exam is open notes (so you can use your notes, the book, the review sheet, and the PPT slides)
- I do not expect any outside research on this at all
- Each exam will consist of two parts.
 - The first part will be short answers (a choice of 2 out of 8-10). I'm looking for about a half page for a short answer. Identify the term and tell me why it is important. All terms are lifted directly from the review sheet.
 - The second part of the exam will be an essay question. There will be multiple questions to choose from here too. As we get closer to the exams, I will talk more about the essay format.
- You have choice of what you want to answer in each part, so read the directions carefully
- Each question has a specific page number target. You can go over the limit, not a problem, but don't go too far over the limit. You don't need to.
- I think **two to three hours** will be enough time for you to write the exam and do well. You can take more time of course, as much as you need. The point here is that I don't think you end to spend hours and hours.
- It might be helpful to read the questions, then review your notes, and the review sheet. Maybe make an outline of the essay. And then start to write.
- As always, the review sheets should be very helpful. You can use the review sheets while you take the exam. It might be a good organizational tool.
- Feel free to email me questions if you have them, but as usual, there are limits to how I can help you.

And, important:

- Sharing this exam with anyone outside the class is a violation of the **VCU Honor Code**
- Working with another student in the class or anyone else while you take this exam is a violation of the **VCU Honor Code**
- As with any take home, the **plagiarism rules** that exist for research papers apply here. Your exams must be your written work. I will run this through the standard plagiarism programs as I do with all research papers.

[Review 1](#)

[Review 2](#)

Citation Assignment

I will explain this on the first day of class and you can follow this link to get the detailed [instructions](#). This is a super easy assignment, but it will give you some research skills that will be essential to writing research papers in upper level classes like this one. The basic idea is this: you will write a basic paragraph that is designed to help you practice citing material and writing a bibliography. September 22

is the initial due date for it. If you do it right, you're done, and you get a 100% on the grade. If you do it wrong, you'll be asked to do it again based on my comments. You'll keep working on it until you've got it right. There is, however, a final deadline (November 17). If you haven't done it right by then (and this can only happen if you don't even try), you'll get a zero. *For the initial due date this assignment is due at the beginning of class in hard copy. There is a ten point penalty for each day it is late with a maximum of a 50% penalty. If it is not completed correctly by the final due date, the grade is a zero (and nobody wants that; I'll be sad; you'll be sad).* The benefit of this is that you'll learn to do citations correctly before the paper is due. That means you'll do the citations correctly on the paper. Hooray. That's very good because the main reason students get grades of C or D on a paper is because they didn't do their citations correctly.

I have written sample paragraphs for you. These provide a template for what I want from you. Just click the links.

- [Sample paragraph with footnotes](#)
- [Sample paragraph with parentheticals](#)
- [Sample Bibliography](#)

Research Paper: The full assignment is in the Files folder or linked right here. The topic is an assigned topic, but you have lots of leeway about how you want to approach it. Your assignment should be fun or maybe scary: Explain the Trump Phenomenon: How has Donald Trump captured the loyalty of the Republican Party in ways that no American politician ever has? Some basics:

- 8-10 pages; more is fine; less is not helpful for your grade.
- Due at the beginning of class on December 1 in hard copy if you come to class or it can be emailed if you generally do not attend class (be careful here; an email problem will not be an excuse for turning in a paper late). A few minutes after class starts, the paper is late.
- You may turn in an outline, rough draft, partial paper, whatever, for review up until November 17. This is optional, just something to help you out if you have questions.
- Typed
- 11 or 12 point font
- Double spaced
- One inch margins
- Late Papers: Problems, Crises, Stress of a global pandemic: We are in uncharted territory right now. The world hasn't seen anything like this for 100 years. I used to teach emergency management and my wife studies public health, so I am well aware of what this pandemic is doing to everyone. Talk to me if you are having some family or personal problems or any difficulty with any of the assignments. The point of this class is for you to learn about the US presidency, and in this crisis, that means giving everyone a lot of wiggle room. So, if you're having any problems, talk to me. We can work it out. I do realize that there are more important things in life than this class and these assignments.

COURSE AND READING SCHEDULE

The following are some fun or useful PPT slideshows. Take a look if you're interested. They are not required; none of the material will be on a test.

[President's Park PPT](#)

[Being a Good Political Consumer](#)

Presidential Library Tour

[Wilson to Ike](#)

[Kennedy and Johnson](#)

[Nixon and Ford](#)

[Carter](#)

[Reagan](#)

[GHW Bush](#)

[Clinton](#)

Week 1: August 22-26: Introduction

- Greenstein, Chapters 1-9
- Read the Constitution
 - [Official US Government Printing Office version](#)
 - [National Archives original text annotated version](#) (with links to changes in the constitution)
- [Introduction PPT](#)
- [Lecture One: August 23: Intro](#)
- [Lecture Two: August 25: Origins I](#)

Week 2: August 29--September 2: Powers of the Presidency

- Goodwin, Chapters 1 and 5 and 9
- [Electoral College to January 6 PPT](#)
- [Lecture Three: August 30: Origins II](#)
- [Lecture Four: September 1: Origins III](#)

Week 3: September 5-9: The Pre-Modern Presidency

- [Pre-Modern Presidents PPT](#)
- Goodwin, Chapters 2, 6, and 10
- [Lecture Five: September 6: Origins IV](#)
- [Lecture Six: September 8: Origins V](#)

Week 4: September 12-16 FDR: The Modern Presidency Begins

- Goodwin, Chapters 3, 7, and 11
- [Lecture Seven: September 13: Pre-Modern Presidents I](#)
- [Lecture Eight: September 15: Pre-Modern Presidents II](#)

Week 5: September 19-23: FDR to Ike

- *September 22: Citation Assignment First Draft Due (at the beginning of class in hard copy or emailed by the start of class)*
- [FDR PPT](#)
- [Lecture 9: September 20: FDR I](#)
- [Lecture 10: September 22: FDR II](#)

Week 6: September 26-30: Ike to JFK: Managing the Presidency

Goodwin, Chapters 4, 8, and 12

- [Leadership, Management, Advising PPT](#)
- [Lecture 11: September 27: FDR to Ike](#)
- [Lecture 12: September 29: Ike to JFK](#)

Week 7: October 3-7: LBJ and the Power of Persuasion

- Brownstein, Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 pages 93-127
- Whipple, Introduction, Chapter 1
- [LBJ PPT](#)
- [Lecture 13: October 4: LBJ 1](#)
- [Lecture 14: October 6: LBJ 2](#)

Week 8: October 10-14: Exam One and Nixon's Rise and Fall

- *Exam One: October 11: Placed in the Files folder of Canvas on October 10 at about 9:00 AM. Due by midnight on October 11 (as October 11 becomes October 12, but that deadline is a soft one; don't sweat an extra hour or so). Type or write the exam.*
- [No Class October 11](#)
- *No Readings*
- [Lecture 15 October 13: Nixon 1](#)

Week 9: October 17-21: Nixon and the Post-Watergate Presidency

- Whipple, Chapters 2 and 4
- Brownstein, Chapter 4 pages 127-136, and Chapter 5
- [Nixon PPT](#)
- [Watergate PPT](#)
- [Scandals Comparison](#)
- [Lecture 16: October 18: Nixon and Watergate](#)
- [Lecture 17: October 20: Nixon, Watergate, Impeachment](#)

Week 10: October 24-28: The Reagan Realignment

- Brownstein, Chapter 6
- Whipple, Chapters 5 and 6
- [Post-Watergate Presidency PPT](#)
- [Reagan PPT](#)
- [Lecture 18: October 25: Post-Watergate Presidency and Reagan](#)
- [Lecture 19: October 27: Reagan](#)

Withdrawal Date October 28

Week 11: October 31-November 4: Reagan and Bush

- Brownstein, Chapters 7-8
- [Lecture 20: November 1: Reagan 2](#)
- Lecture 21 was not recorded (made me very sad), but I have similar recordings from last year. Use the following recordings, and listen to them as indicated below.
- [Lecture 21A: November 3: Reagan 3 \(Begin at 47 minutes\)](#)
- [Lecture 21B: November 3: Reagan 3 \(End at 56 minutes\)](#)

Week 12: November 7-11: Bush and the Changes in the Republican Party

- *No class November 8: VOTE! Because the people who believe that the earth is flat will be voting and you don't want them deciding the future of the US.*
- Sykes, Introduction, Chapters 1-8
- [Bush and Clinton 1990s](#)
- [Lecture 22: November 10: Reagan and Bush 41](#)

Week 13: November 14-18: Clinton

- *Optional rough drafts accepted until November 17*
- *Final Due Date for Citation Assignment November 17*
- Sykes, Chapters 9-10
- [Bush 43](#)
- [Lecture 23: November 15: Clinton](#)
- [Lecture 24: November 17: Clinton to GW Bush](#)

Fall Break: November 21-25

Week 14: November 28—December 2: GW Bush and Obama

- *December 1: Paper Due, at the beginning of class in hard copy or emailed to me by the beginning of class.*
- *No Readings*
- [Obama PPT](#)

- [Trump One PPT](#)
- [Lecture 25: November 29: GW Bush](#)
- [Lecture 26: December 1 Bush to Obama](#)

Week 15: December 5-9: The Trump Presidency

- Sykes, Chapters 11-17
- [Trump Two PPT](#)
- [Lecture 27: December 6: Obama to Trump](#)
- [Lecture 28: December 8: Trump](#)

***Final Exam: December 13:** I will place the exam in the Files folder of Canvas at about 9:00 AM on December 12. It will be due back to me (emailed) by midnight on December 13 (as December 13 becomes December 14). Again, this is a soft deadline. Type or write the exam.*

Other Important Stuff

Political Science Advising

If you are a Political Science major we highly recommend that you meet with your friendly and helpful POLI advisors, Nathan Bickett and Jen Clayton, at least once a semester to make sure you are on track - doing what you need to do and not doing what you don't need to do - and to discuss your academic and professional goals. Current minors and those considering a POLI major or minor are also encouraged to visit.

You may make an appointment through the Navigator app or through a link on your VCU Portal ([remote advising webpage](#)). You may also reach us at poliadvisor@vcu.edu

Political Science Librarian

Nia Rodgers is the librarian for Political Science. She can help you find peer-reviewed materials to use in your research. She can be reached at: sroddgers@vcu.edu or you can make an appointment at: <https://vcu.libcal.com/appointment/8778>