

OPINION

Two Wesleyan Faculty Give Grades to President Obama

By Cameron Matthews

It is difficult to assess a president less than two years into office. The true effect, and effectiveness, of any president can really only be gauged years after he left the White House. But that's no fun, so let's judge President Obama now.

Any president has the freest hand in foreign and defense policy. Congress is usually deferential to the executive in these areas, as is the Court. Despite Administration protests to the contrary, President Obama has continued many of the Bush-era policies he inherited. Certainly there is less emphasis on preemption, but the Iraq War went on long beyond the inauguration and only technically closed very recently. The Afghan strategy looks a great deal like Bush's surge. Guantanamo Bay is still open. Many allies of the United States—such as Great Britain and Israel—feel scorned by the President. He is still more popular than President Bush internationally, but many foreign governments feel uneasy about President Obama's handling of the ship of state.

This election cycle is dominated by the economy. In fact, the Democratic Party is poised to lose a large share of seats on November 2nd partly because of the economy. The President's policies to spur economic growth come from the standard Democratic economic playbook that focuses on deficit spending and public investment in private enterprise. The problem he faces is that it is not working or is perceived by the public to have not worked. Job growth is minimal. GDP growth is anemic. The cruel irony for him, or any president so situated, is that the power of government to affect the economy is minimal but the public disproportionately blames (or credits) the party in power for a bad economy. In 2008, it was the GOP that took the heat. This year, the Democrats will feel the wrath.

Beyond the stimulus bill, the President's biggest domestic achievement has been massive health care reform. This has proven to be a mixed bag for him. He has accomplished something that the left has been dreaming of, and failing to achieve, for over a century. But the bill was unpopular when it passed and remains so today. Democratic candidates are not taking credit for it in their own campaigns and the Republicans are getting a lot of independent support for their "defund and derail" approach to the issue. This, along

with the stimulus, seems to have been the final straw in a series of events that led to the Tea Party Movement, whose impact on the political system is growing.

I'm going to be careful and give President Obama an incomplete. He faces a tough road ahead. The next Congress will not be as friendly to him (and may feature a GOP-controlled House), so his personal political achievements will diminish. This is, to a great extent, a situation of his own making since he failed to keep and expand upon the electoral coalition that put him the White House and gave him large majorities in both chambers of Congress. As long as the economy hurts, he too will hurt. Many foreign policy challenges wait,

as well. In January, President Obama will face a crossroads. He will be in a place much like Jimmy Carter faced in 1979 and Ronald Reagan faced in 1983: beaten in a midterm and unpopular. Carter and Reagan enjoyed different fates for their re-election bids. Carter lost in 1980 (to Reagan) and Reagan won in a landslide in 1984. Only time will tell whose path will best describe President Obama's future.

(Dr. Matthews is an assistant professor of political science)

By Jonathan Sarris

1) Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—C-. The President deserves credit for scaling back our troop presence in Iraq, but the

Afganistan escalation seems dubious at best. He should have learned enough from history to see the long odds against success in this kind of insurgency, and the harmful political consequences of a protracted unpopular war.

2) The economy—B-. The President showed boldness in deciding in favor of substantive federal action to bolster the financial system, even if too little of it trickled down to ordinary people. Let's hope that he remembers Franklin Roosevelt needed a second New Deal in 1935 to really help common folk and secure his political future.

3) Domestic policies —B-. Health insurance reform was a major accomplishment that no president since

Lyndon Johnson has achieved. But the fact that many of the reforms will not take effect for years, and that a public option was not seriously considered, is a major disappointment to those who consider health care a fundamental human right.

4) Diplomacy—B+ Obama's worldwide popularity is a great boon to the United States. More importantly, he seems willing to actually use this reservoir of good will to tackle difficult issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unfortunately, such good will tends to vanish in direct proportion to a President's intent to utilize it.

(Dr. Sarris is an associate professor of history)

Issue In-Focus: The Obama Presidency

As we approach the important midterm elections (for U.S. Representatives and some U.S. Senators), many voters, in deciding on their preferred candidates, have been considering the performance of President Obama. What is your opinion about the job he is doing as president?"

Georgettae Fields-Turrentine

I think President Obama is doing fairly well thus far. He has only been president since 2008, so I don't expect too much so soon from him. Being a Democrat, I feel like he inherited a mess. I knew that in order to clean up the various problems America had while Bush was in office, it would take a full term. Obama has been working diligently to ensure ALL Americans receive healthcare, no matter how much income they bring in.

The president isn't one dimensional; by this I mean he relates to the upper, middle, and lower classes. When he talks, he doesn't make anyone feel inferior but instead gives hope to all walks of life. No one is perfect and so I cannot expect him to have a halo on his head and to not make mistakes because that would be ridiculous. When he officially became president, his approval ratings were high, but now half of America is anti-Obama and for what? The man is trying his best to fix the problems we had three years ago.

Leila Heinonen

I think Barack Obama has done a good job as President of United States. There were serious problems that George Bush left, and Obama has been doing a good job trying to solve them. His election campaign promised "CHANGE" and that's what he has been trying to accomplish. I have a feeling that he is really

dedicated to his job and believes that there is an opportunity to change America for the better. Of course he is not perfect - no one is, but he tries his best to make change. The health care plan is one of the biggest changes that has been in the news a lot. I think that already proves that he is doing a pretty good job. We should always remember that Obama jumped into a big mess—two costly wars and a financial crisis. There are no easy ways out, but he IS making the changes.

Rodney Holley

Considering who he had to succeed, President Obama is doing a good job. While some issues may seem to remain unchanged, Obama has accomplished some goals he said he had set before his election into office: the stimulus bill and healthcare reform. I'm satisfied with Obama's performance as president because of his inspiring leadership. And I like that he holds firm on his decisions, though not to the point of embarrassing himself and the country. I'm not deeming Obama as the best president ever, as everyone makes mistakes and I don't agree with his every decision. But I am saying that he gives hope to someone (me) who is typically skeptical of the U.S. government.

John Kostet

When evaluating President Obama's work halfway into his four-year term, there are several key factors to consider. First I believe that Obama in general do not seem to understand the actual power of the American president. Of course, he is considered to be the most powerful man in the world, possessing the highest position in the world's only remaining Super Power. But in reality his only true power is the power to persuade. For him to get stuff done, get legislation through and reforms made, he needs strong support in the congress for things to run smoothly, and he needs to persuade a majority to agree with his solutions. That has not been the case and, sadly, will probably not be either.

Within his party there have been several splits and diverse opinions about the outspoken goal of change. I am convinced that everybody who voted for Obama voted for hope and change - "Yes we can." But the views on how the change would be accomplished were various and certainly diffuse among the masses. So when the president appears to be unable to make the anticipated change, his approval ratings fall. People blame the president for being passive, when it's actually the congress that won't work with him. We often get fed the statement that there are no "quick fixes," and it upsets people because we usually have an unrealistic perception of the president's powers. The president is supposed to be a super hero with unlimited muscle.

It is a major challenge for the president to make change when the "culture of no change" is so strong in this country, unless the change involves tax reductions and less government spending. Obama's dream of change is different. It is primarily aimed at the less fortunate, and that type of change contests the American culture of no collective action, the American self-made system, the dream that everybody can make it by themselves.

We often see the upside of that on television, stories about successful millionaires and billionaires who benefited greatly from the competitive game of capitalism. There is definitely nothing wrong with their success or their desire to get rich. But both President Obama and I believe that if the way to wealth for some leaves others in misery, that we need to leave others behind, then we have a problem. The desire for prosperity and the well being for all should be a universal goal. But this country

is obviously not ready to take care of each other through the means that the president dreams about. It's a difficult situation, and it has been since the day he swore the oath. So with that in mind, I think the U.S. president has tried his best, but is still far from accomplishing the goals he set.

Another part that most Americans seem to forget about President Obama is the way he has turned the world's perception of their country. Just by being the well-traveled and multicultural globetrotter he is, people around the world viewed him differently as he stepped into office. Compare him to former presidents who had a hard time naming major capital cities. Even though America is still fighting two awful wars, the attitude has changed with Obama. One of the first and best things he did was to speak to the whole Arabian world at a university in Cairo, Egypt. He stated that America is absolutely not at war with Islam, but in war with terror. That is the opposite approach of former president George W. Bush's statement "You are either with us or against us."

Emelie Lundgren

Obama combines a confident leadership with the humility of a simple man, something that has been lacking in the American presidency during the last two presidential terms. He has restored a great deal of the relationships America has with the rest of the world, something that might just have saved the U.S. from future terrorist attacks. The tension between America and the rest of the world was pretty harsh for a while, something I experienced in Sweden, and it seemed like the tight grip the Bush Administration wanted to keep on the world was about to backfire.

When Obama came to power, with his confident yet humble approach, and loosened that grip, he also made sure relationships became less tense, a lot more friendly. For that reason only, I think that the American people should thank him because something like 9/11 was about to be repeated. However, he is not only a good leader, he is an excellent speaker and has a way of inspiring the people of his country. I have heard from friends back home that he seems to talk more than he acts. I do not agree with this, as it takes time to make sure reforms and changes go through. Bureaucracy is a great enemy to reforms, and therefore there is nothing good with rushing or setting deadlines to Obama's plans. To destroy something is very easy, and to make something better is very hard. I am convinced Obama has done all in his power to get America to where it is today, and since only half his term has passed so far, I am sure there will be great changes to look forward to in the future.

Joshua Meeks

President Barack Obama entered office with a four-course meal worth of problems and has yet to fix the ones that truly plague our country. He gained the people's trust by his dominant speaking and his ability to touch the minds and feelings of these people. His entire first year seemed more like a victory lap and all he did was shake hands and kiss babies. The first issue he tackled was health care, and he didn't even get that done until over a year after he was sworn into office. Certainly health care was an issue, but how will we pay for it now? I hope it's not by cutting defense spending. According to my father, a Navy vet, too many soldiers need to buy their own body armor and other equipment. This has cost American lives.

President Obama got elected by promising to move troops out of Iraq. He is currently on the right path of achieving this; only he is moving them out and putting them in Afghanistan. He has raised the national debt to \$13.5 trillion and it continues to climb. That's a 24

percent increase from when George Bush was in office, and it came about in part by forcing the health care bill to be passed. He hasn't helped much with jobs either. The unemployment rate has risen since he took office, reaching as high as 10.6 percent from the 8.9 percent we had when he took office. I don't really see any real progress. I think he's made too many promises to people.

His lack of accomplishments has even led to the rise of the Tea Party, an extreme right-wing group. President Obama's approval rating, according to the Gallup Poll, currently sits at a 46 percent. I don't really feel too great about that.

Bristy Parker

The constant remark I hear about President Barack Obama is that he tries to be more of a celebrity than a president. But I feel that Obama has been able to work and "play." In my opinion, Obama's performance is very satisfactory. He has kept his promise about removing the combat brigades in Iraq. He has clearly been working to reasonably end the war and bring troops home. So I think that is a job well-done. I also think he is doing a good job with the tax-cutting issues, especially for Americans with lower incomes. According to CNN, his approval rating is at 46 percent. I'm no political junkie, but I don't think that number is too shabby for the time he's been in office. Of course no one is perfect, but being the president is a huge job. He's still got a ways to go on health care and laws of gay marriage, and the economy. If the economy isn't working, then neither is the country. But I'm behind Obama and his efforts and still expect great things to come.

Kevin Quicker

President Obama has been criticized a lot since he has entered office. This makes sense because he was someone that came with very little to no experience dealing with national and international politics. According to Gallup.com, only 43% of the nation approves of the job Obama is doing, whereas he was at 69% at the beginning of his term. However, I give him some slack because he had a lot of issues on his plate, the main one being the economic crisis. And slowly but surely the economy is recovering, which gives the citizens of America some hope. Over all I am neutral on this subject. I don't love him and I don't hate him. As long as America is still up and running, I'm happy.

Melanie Rhodes

President Obama came into a difficult situation as he took office in 2008. I believe he has done a good job with what he's had to work with and the obstacles he had to face. Even so, I feel like sometimes he is not doing enough. However, Obama is trying to make peace around the world and doing his best to help the economy by implementing programs such as the health care bill, and creating jobs for the unemployed. If I was to grade Obama at this time, I would say he has earned a B+ because he still has a way to go.

Kandyse Shaw

I am not very familiar with exactly everything that takes place in the government but I do pay attention to a lot that affects me and the people around me. I think President Obama wasn't entirely ready for the job that was set before him. He has been seen as very indecisive about the decisions that he is asked to make. He's often sending a message that he is unable to make tough decisions in a timely manner. Other places around the world may view Obama as being spineless and nervous.

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