

COURSE SYLLABUS  
**AMERICAN GOVERNMENT**

A distance learning course  
Pol\*B111 (D)---CRN #1288, 3 credits,  
January 22-May 19, 2014  
Richard Patrick, Instructor

COURSE OVERVIEW

**I. Scope of course (catalogue description)**

Scope of course: This course examines our society's politics and its patterns in the Constitution, congress, judiciary, and presidency. Topics of study include political ideologies, interest group pluralism, elite influence, citizen alienation, elections, institutional power, democracy's requirements, and others. Present-day issues will be analyzed from the framework of these concepts.

Learning objectives include becoming politically informed, engaging in political discussions, and analyzing the government's responsiveness to citizens' needs.

Course paperback text---The Irony of Democracy by L. Schubert, T. Dye, & H. Zeigler, 16<sup>th</sup> edition

Course prerequisites: none, additionally, this course, has been deemed transferable to other colleges. It fulfills a general education and/or liberal arts requirement for several majors.

**II. Welcome**

As your instructor and facilitator of your learning, I welcome each of you to this course. I have constructed the course to be supportive and encouraging of your interest in the study of society's politics and its effects both nationally and globally. Whatever advice you may want to communicate to me at any time to enhance your success in the course will be taken into consideration.

This course has been constructed to foster discovery and learning about range of topics and issues. It requires individual effort from each of you. Please recognize and remember that there is an ongoing expectation that you are willing and able to be an independent learner within the unique circumstances of an on-line distance learning course. Let me assure you, however, that I will be regularly communicating with you as to how you should be self initiating for achievement in the course.

**III. A. General Learning Objectives**

This course is part of a foundation for an individual's liberal arts education which endeavors to nurture a person's intellectual growth and responsible citizenship for participation in a democratic society. Critical thinking, open-minded discovery, creative generalizations, and shared learning are some of the traits of intellectual growth which will be encouraged in the learning exercises of our course. This on-line course potentially enables everyone to become part of a community of learners, but, to re-emphasize, you must be self-initiating and self-responsible in undertaking the study requirements of the course.

More specifically, the learning activities of the course are designed to develop your skills in thinking and analyzing current, political events and issues. You will need to regularly read newspapers and devote a lot of regular attention to television news as well as particular Internet sources towards becoming more aware and informed of American politics and government. The course includes a research assignment that requires using internet news sources, particularly from [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), in applying course concepts.

Some advice: You will soon realize that politics is extremely complicated and confusing. Some of the confusion and difficulties in the course occur because you are moving beyond just a general awareness of political events in the news to their systematic study. It's all right to be confused, and the course provides ideas and terms to help you sort things out. So jump right in the flow of information and knowledge, paddle a lot in keeping your above water by conscientiously doing the assignments, and ask questions by email of me and by posing questions on the Discussion Board, as I am supposed to help you keep your head above water and actually achieve academic success.

### III. B. Citizenship and Career Objectives

The ideas of this course are part of your skills development in becoming active in your community and in your career pursuits. The course provides information for you to understand politics for participation by being an advocate of your values and beliefs that hopefully will be a benefit to yourself and to your community. Learning about positive politics can also further your endeavors in your career field. Your work life will require you to understand its organizational dynamics, and the constructive political skills it calls for in one's career advancement. Many of the discussion topics of the course will stimulate your thinking about the positive role politics can have in one's worklife.

### IV. A community of learners

Beyond your independent studying, we are also a community of learners. Even though we won't be together in the typical college classroom, it is my expectation that we will be engaging each other via threaded discussions on a web site Discussion Board and by e-mails about the topics of the course. I encourage each of you to be honest and candid about the issues of the course. I truly believe we have a lot to learn from each other. As a practical consideration, your discussion participation and comments in shared learning will be accorded a grade value for each required activity towards your overall grade.

While we will be learning from each other, it is my expectation that we each should always endeavor to be considerate and respectful of each other's views---even as we analyze, discuss, and advocate positions on the issues confronting the country and its citizens. I encourage candor in your communications, but you should do so in a civil manner. Very likely there will be some "stressing" in this sort of course which involves differing views regarding politics; but everyone is expected to abide by the norms of tolerance for open expression of ideas. No one should be targeted for hurtful messages by someone due to his or her views. Please be mindful that this is a college level of learning and we must be responsible in our academic freedoms.

### V. Grading Procedures and Standards

Recognition by me of your learning occurs in a variety of ways: e-mail feedback from me, exams, and our interactive discussions via the Discussion Board will be my feedback on the quality of your learning. Grades for specific activities are useful and necessary. The following is the grading schema for the various assigned activities indicated through out the syllabus.

Overall, there are four areas for grades: Discussion board comments/analyses, a research paper, and two(2) exams. Exams do not cover the whole term's concepts; however, there will be a connecting or integrating of ideas between sections of material.

Each of these areas will be given the standard "A" through "F" grade with corresponding numerical points of "100" to "0." The two exams each will weigh 30% of the course grade, discussions and the paper are weighted at 20% each. I will be scoring your required, posted comments from 10 to 0 points. Then I will add them up for your accumulated points for that requirement and the total will be 1/5th of your final grade average.

### On Surface and Deeper Learning

As to concerns about getting the grade that you feel you deserve, go back to what I stated about the broad view in meaningful learning in this course. This is a survey course and some may want a "surface" awareness of American politics. But I also provide and emphasize "deeper learning," which is related to higher scores. I provide guidelines throughout the assignments as to what needs to be done as you study in gaining a "deeper learning."

### **More on Discussion Board activities and grading.**

I will be assessing and scoring each of your commentaries and reports that appear on the Discussion Board. There is a separate Instructor's Discussion file which you should read on a regular basis as I provide feedback and elaboration regarding discussion comments by students.

#### Discussion Board Criteria

1. As you respond to a particular question, your comments should connect with the assigned reading material or ideas you have obtained from another significant source, such as from the Internet which must be cited.
2. Try to be concise and stay on topic as to the question posed. If the question logically leads to another area, make the connection clearly as you develop your position.
3. Try not to ramble or sermonize a bit too much. I know we each may feel strongly about various issues, but endeavor to develop your position logically, and based on facts or data, that can be verified.
4. Be a critical thinker. Ask yourself if you're being somewhat detached and objective about the topic. Your moral or normative orientations are relevant, but you need to decide how much they should shape your position on a particular question or issue. The critical thinker is able to recognize one's own subjectivities as well as others' biases. A normative orientation can help crystallize discussion, but should not contaminate clear, valid reasoning.
5. Overall, I will be assessing your comments as to a. reflecting that you accurately read the assigned material that is related to the question, b. your inclusion of facts that make for sound generalizations, c. the logic of your position, and d. independent and original thoughts brought to the discussion question for all of us to be challenged by as a community of learners. When questioning your discussion scores, ask yourself if your posting really does include all the required elements listed about in situations where you might want to appeal a grade score from me.
6. As to grade points which will be allotted to each posted commentary, the following are other considerations and criteria in my grading your discussion analyses. You are to refer to these considerations when I report to you that your comments are rated a 7 or a 9, etc. I will not be given any further explanation as to each of your Discussion Board comments and it is usually very informative and helpful to compare your analysis in terms of quality to others which are posted. It is usually very obvious which comments are really fully and deeply thought about and that some extra research or reading typically has been undertaken. Everyone should work at improving the quality of details and logic in each one's weekly discussion contributions. A discussion analysis that receives a 10 or 9, which is an "A" does what I spelled out above. It references terms from the assigned readings, and from news events---and especially the information I provide in my lectures in the Lecture file that are related to the discussion topics. An "A" posting has details and logically, more fully develops ideas. It also contributes new and independently thought out ideas in response to the topic or questions. Analysis which is rated an 8 or "B" includes some terms, but may also have errors in what is said and is not entirely accurate as to what is described. Some of the generalizations may not be

adequately developed and thus is less informative and persuasive. A “C” rated discussion comment is rather general and displays only sketchy information about the topic. Comments less than a 7 lack elements of these 3 types of answers and is thus very weak and is typically underdeveloped in constructing generalizations or statements regarding the questions being discussed. Lower grades may also be because the required discussion was posted very late or not at all.

**GRADING OUTLINE: Exams, papers, and discussion criteria for scores**

<b>A</b>	<b>90-100</b> <b>10-9</b> <b>points</b>	Analysis is excellent with many connections to course concepts. Unusual insights, and original reasoning in the explanation. Informative details. Conclusions logically following from the information and
<b>B</b>	<b>80-89</b> <b>8 points</b>	Good explanation which uses pertinent supporting examples and correct and several valid generalizations, but also has some weak
<b>C</b>	<b>70-79</b> <b>7 points</b>	A mix of some solid and some weak generalizations which meets some statements are questionable and insufficiently developed. Some course concepts.
<b>D</b>	<b>60 – 69</b> <b>6 points</b>	Response does not meet the minimum required for assignment by pertinent to the topic or question. Factual inaccuracies or reasoning lacks specific evidence overall.
<b>F</b>	<b>59-0</b> <b>5-0</b> <b>points</b>	Response doesn't directly address the discussion questions or assertions with relevant examples, major flaws in reasoning, exp understanding of main concepts. Did not complete the assignment

(Note: This grading format is developed for Professor Patrick’s political science courses.)

And by the way, I always encourage valid and considerably made corrections to anyone's comments made in the posted discussions. I certainly am not infallible and if I state something that is erroneous, or anyone else for that matter, then, please make your contribution in correcting any misinformation

As to your concerns about your grades, I will, of course, discuss any of your questions via e-mail and, if there are generalized concerns, I will post any clarifications in my Instructor’s Discussion file. While grades are an understandable concern for each student, please be reassured that I am open to constructive and confidential e-mail discussions as to a fair grade for your various efforts; so try not to stress over them too, too much. While most of our email will occur through the email file, more confidential matters can be communicated via my other email address: Richard.Patrick00@gmail.com.

**Paper Assignments**

A short paper is required and I will indicate its requirements and due dates through the Announcement file. Student papers are to be posted on the Discussion Board and I will announce in advance the specific due dates.

To re-emphasize, the guidelines indicated above for Discussion Board comments concerning critical thinking, logic, facts, etc. also apply to the paper assignments.

Extra credit---While I prefer students to focus more on putting the time in to doing well on the assigned activities and thus get maximum points, some are interested in extra credit and there are

activities which can be undertaken. For example, you might view a relevant film such as "Nixon" or you should regularly watch the national Sunday morning talk shows such as ABC's "This Week in Review," the Fox new channel on with Chris Wallace, or which review the week's significant political events. Also there is the PBS's excellent news analyses nightly. From these or other sources, your analysis must apply course concepts and be posted as a summary on the Discussion Board. Also, refer to item 5.b as to another possibility from Chapter 13 in investigating present day civil rights issues.

In undertaking extra credit exercises, approval is required from the instructor who will offer questions to be explored concerning the bonus work. You need to be in email communication with me on such exercises.

## **VI. On keeping informed**

I want to strongly emphasize that this distance education course really assumes and requires that you are regularly, if not daily, accessing valid, useful Internet sources in making yourself informed about current political events and issues. All the major newspaper and T.V. news sources provide abundant information over the Internet and you should bookmark some of the web sites. For example, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/> has links to "Politics," "Congress," etc. which contains tons of news reports and analyses. Similarly <http://www.pbs.org/> has a link to the "OnLine News Hour" of the Jim Lehrer news program and you can download useful information from that television news source which is on Public T.V., usually channels 16 and 24. Furthermore, take advantage of the audio reports on NPR.org which are sources of lively, stimulating information and makes thinking about politics easier.

Our open society provides for an abundance of other news sources such as magazines and journal such at <http://www.thenation.com/> which is a source of "progressive" political reports and analyses. The conservative magazine, The National Review, is a contrasting source for your thinking. In short, as a self-initiating, independent learner, you are required to seek out information, cite the sources, and make timely information part of your posted discussion comments. Since we are not together in a real-time classroom, you cannot pickup info from classroom discussion and thus must do a lot on your own and at your own pace. You will discover that there are a lot of lively, controversial sources such at <http://www.moveon.org/> and others, but refrain from relying too much on extremely partisan, ideological sources.

## **VII. Other Standards**

The following provisions are required by the college for your notification.

Academic Standards."At Middlesex CC we expect the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in accordance with the Board of Trustees' Proscribe Conduct Policy in Section 5.2.1 of the Board of Trustees' Manual. This policy prohibits cheating on examinations, unauthorized collaboration on assignments, unauthorized access to examinations or course materials, plagiarism, and other proscribe activities. Plagiarism is defined as the use of another's ideas(s) or phrases(s) and representing that/those ideas as your own, either intentionally or unintentionally."

ADA Accommodations Note. "Students with physical or learning disabilities, who may require accommodations, are encouraged to contact the Counseling Office. After disclosing the nature of the disability, students are urged to discuss their needs with individual instructors. This should be done at the beginning of each semester. Instructors, in conjunction with appropriate college officials, will provide assistance and/or accommodation only to those students who have completed this process."

Withdrawal Policy---“ You may withdraw from this class any time before the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> week of the semester. A completed and signed withdrawal form must be on file in the Records Office by the deadline in order to receive a “W” on your transcript. If you fail to complete this process on time, you will receive a letter grade at the end of the semester, which will include zeroes for any work not submitted. Course withdrawals may affect financial aid and veteran’s benefits. Please make this decision carefully and with the help of your advisor. See the Academic Calendar and the College Catalog for specific dates and procedures regarding the withdrawal process.”

### **VIII. College Internet Access**

You may look for journal articles in electronic databases from the college or from home. To use computers at the college, you must set up a computer account. You will need your student ID number, also known as your Banner number. Ask a staff person the library or the computer lab about how to do this. When using a computer from outside the college, you will gain access to the databases through a Proxy Server. You can contact the college’s reference librarians for assistance in learning how to access its resources from outside the college.

You will find many excellent and useful databases listed there. Two databases which may be most useful are MasterFile Premier and Advanced Academic ASAP. Each database includes online help.

### **IX. Main Standing Operating Procedures**

1. **Each week you must regularly check the “Announcements,” “Calendar,” “ Discussion Board,” and "Lecture" links** of the course's web site for your assigned study activities, related readings, and due dates. This is a must; so regularly check the "Announcements" as it will contain updates and reminders regarding our weekly activities.

2. **IMPORTANT:** I provide further elaboration/feedback on course concepts and discussion topics in an “Instructor’s Discussion file, which you must read regularly.

3. Be aware that some of the ideas of discussion comments and especially my Instructor’s Feedback will later reappear in some variation in the exam questions. Taking notes from other student comments of our shared discussion exercises can be useful information for more fully formed answers in the exams.

4. On-line study is an active work–in-progress. There will be occasional modifications due to emerging newsworthy items and issues that are relevant to our study. Rest assured that notice of modifications will be given in advance and will not deviate significantly from the general learning activities

5. Also, I want to alert you in advance that sometimes a particular article may be difficult to read due to formatting or other screen presentations features of your computer. You may have to enlarge the print on some articles for better readability and attempt other adjustments to the transmitted material. I suggest that you call the Distance Learning at 860-343-5756 for assistance in these technical difficulties. But by hanging in there and getting assistance, you'll improve in dealing with these factors.

### **X. Instructor Communication and Contact**

Most weekly course communication should be through the vista email link. I will endeavor to respond to your general messages within 24-48 hours. Graded assessment on assignments, and particularly exams, will likely take longer.

### **COURSE TOPICS AND TEXT READING ASSIGNMENTS**

1. Focusing on politics

Reading: “Defining Politics” in E-Reserve file

and instructor's posted lecture on politics

Learning objective: a. develop a working definition of politics  
b. apply to current issues such as affirmative action in education and employment, and others.

2. Political ideologies and ideologues

Reading: "Political Ideologies" in instructor's Lecture file  
Chapter 6, pp.134-136 & pp.144-148.

Learning objective:

a. identify main beliefs of two contrasting political ideologies and  
b. apply ideology to issues and family socialization

3. Principles and requirements of democracy Reading: Chapter 1 and instructor's posted lecture on democracy

Learning objective: a. identify core principles of democratic societies  
b. examine a current issue in which a democratic principle is at issue  
c. explain how group pluralism fosters and impedes democratic outcomes

4. Beliefs and politics in constitution-making

Reading: Chapter 2

Learning objective: a. identify the key beliefs of the Founding Fathers  
b. explain the beliefs' conflicts with democracy's ideals  
c. describe early constitutional outcomes for women, slaves, the lower class masses

5. Democracy's irony: elitism and semi-democratic masses

Reading: Chapters 1 & 4, esp.85-100.

Optional credit assignment: Chapter 13-Civil Rights

Learning objective: a. differentiate the politics of elites from the masses  
b. explain why the masses can foster democratic outcomes

6. The Functions of elections and voting Reading: Chapter 6 and instructor's posted lecture

Learning objective: a. identify internal party conflicts in presidential elections  
b. identify the critical role of minority groups in voting

### **Exam #1**

7. Congress's structures and procedures Reading: Chapter 8 and instructor's posted lectures

Learning objective: a. identify the major political forces in lawmaking  
b. explain the positive functions/purposes of legislative politics

8. Legislative determinants: the officialdom, iron triangles, etc.

Reading: "Jim Wright Takes Charge" in E-Reserve

Learning objective: a. Describe the caucuses in the identity politics of Congress  
b. differentiate between party-line and nonpartisan voting

9. The president as co-legislator

Learning objective: Assess a president's usage of institutional resources in his legislative record

10. The politics of presidential leadership Reading: Chapter 9, particularly on President Obama's background, and instructor's posted lectures

Learning objective: a. describe the politics of democratic symbolism in presidential leadership  
b. specify requirements of presidential leadership in democratic foreign policy making/implementation

12. Presidents in warmaking and diplomacy

Learning objective: a. identify the beliefs in a president's ideology of military interventionism  
b. identify applications of "soft power" in presidents' foreign policy

## **FINAL EXAM**