

## AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

Pol\*B111 ---CRN 1164,

An on-line, distance learning course 3 credits,

January 17—May 14, 2018

Richard Patrick, Instructor

### I. Scope of course

This course examines our society's politics and its patterns from 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. It is part of the pathway of courses to the state's senior colleges and universities.

General 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, 17<sup>th</sup> edition

Course prerequisites: none, additionally, this course, has been deemed transferable to other colleges. It fulfills a general education, liberal arts, and stem requirement for several majors. Gen. Ed.: Social Phenomena fulfillment

### II. Welcome

As your instructor/facilitator in 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 national governing. 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. I assure you, however, that I will be regularly

communicating with you via “Announcements” 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 and pathway on social phenomenon which potentially nurtures a person’s intellectual growth and 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 through the learning exercises of our course.

I encourage you to check out this Ted Talk link on the virtues and practices of critical thinking:

<https://youtu.be/dltUGF8GdTW>

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 devote regular attention to the news media as well as particular Internet sources towards becoming more aware to keep informed currently regarding American politics and government.

The course includes a research assignment that requires using internet news sources, such the [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), and others for documentation.

You will soon realize, if not already, 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 questions out. So jump right into the flow of information and knowledge, paddle a lot in keeping your head above water by conscientiously doing the assignments, and ask questions by email of me and by raising questions in the section at the bottom of the Discussion units that is provided.

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, **through social engagement**, that hopefully will be a benefit to yourself and to your community.

Learning about constructive, productive 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. Really.

#### **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 believe we have a lot to learn from each other.

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 privileges.

**Your major (or possible major):** Some in the course may be a Criminal Justice curriculum major or Human Services or other disciplines for which American government and its politics does and can have direct impacts. As you think about the course's concepts and issues, you might bring some of the concerns from your major to the required Discussion postings.

For example, we explore judicial review in terms of political science's concepts about elites. We do not delve extensively into its historic, legal interpretations by the courts as that consideration can be explored in some the CJ courses.

Political Science's perspective provides its own discipline's concepts and method of analysis. It does not fall solely in History or another discipline's mode of thinking; in other words, we study more than who did what and when and look into the why. In the Lecture file, I provide a framework from political science, "Thinking about politics," for you to apply to your discussion postings and exams.

## **V. Grading Procedures and Standards**

Assessment of your learning occurs in a variety of ways: e-mail feedback, the research paper and exam grades, and feedback comments, when warranted, on some of your discussion postings in addition to its scores. Grades for specific activities are useful and necessary. towards improved learning and overall academic achievement.

The following is the grading schema for the various assigned activities. Overall, there are four areas for grades: Discussion board comments/analyses, a research paper, and two exams. Exams do not cover the whole term's concepts; however, they require connecting or integrating of ideas between sections of course 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 average them for 1/5th of your final grade average.

However, your final course grade is not solely averaging of scores. As is an instructor's responsibility, I look for a pattern of progressive improvement. Thus, having a momentary slump does not destined you to a low grade, but the converse also may apply.

For example, a high term paper does not always "save" a weak exam result which might indicate a weak understanding of important course concepts. My best advice is to work steadily, learn from possible previous week's slipups, make gradual improvements in Discussion postings, have strong exam scores, and you will likely do well.

### "Surface" and Broader, Deeper Learning

This is a survey course and some may be inclined to settle for beginners' "surface" awareness of American politics. Nonetheless, I will be "pushing" you towards a "deeper learning," which higher scores are signs of.

I provide guidelines throughout the assignments as to what needs to be done as you study in gaining this “broader, deeper learning.”

### **Discussion postings and grading 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 as in a “rant.” 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.
5. A normative orientation can help crystallize discussion, but should not contaminate clear, valid reasoning. Again, I provide a framework, “Thinking about Politics,” on how to undertake political analysis which involves seeing cause-and-effect with conditions that shape political outcomes. I encourage to read that overview as it can enhance your thinking and discussion score

In summary, I will be assessing your comments as to a. reflecting that you accurately read the assigned material that is related to the question, b. 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 actually does include all the required elements listed in situations where you might want to appeal a grade score.

I will not be providing further explanations to every Discussion postings. It is usually very informative/useful to compare your analysis in terms of details to others which are posted. It is usually very obvious which comments are more fully thought about with research undertaken.

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 overviews in the Lecture file which 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 posting can be too general and displays sketchy information about the topics. Comments scored at 7 or less lack elements of the preceding 3 types of answers. Lower grades may also be because the required discussion was posted very late or not at all.

#### **More on scores and grades:**

A—90-100—10-9 points (to a posting)

Analysis is excellent with many connections to course concepts. Has supporting examples or evidence, unusual insights, and independent reasoning in the explanation.

Information is factually correct and provides verifiable details from cited sources. Conclusions logically following from the provided information.

B—80-89--8-8.9 points (to a posting)

Good explanation which uses pertinent supporting examples and reasoning. Most information is factually correct and several valid generalizations, but also has some weak or under-developed propositions

C—70-79—7-7.9 points(to a posting)

A mix of some solid and some weak generalizations which meets minimum required by the assignment, but some statements are questionable and insufficiently developed. Sketchy or minimal application of pertinent course concepts.

D—60 – 69—6-6.9 points (to a posting)

Posting does not meet the minimum required for assignment by lacking application of concepts and not pertinent to the topic or question. Factual inaccuracies or reasoning flaws, and response is too general and lacks specific evidence overall.

F— 59-0—5.9-0 points (to a posting)

Posting does not directly address the discussion questions or assigned topic. The response fails to support assertions with relevant examples, major flaws in reasoning, explanations are unclear, displays inadequate understanding of main concepts. Did not complete the assignment.

(Note: This grading format is solely for the instructor's political science courses.)

And by the way, I encourage valid, considerately made corrections to anyone's comments made in the postings. I certainly am not infallible and if I state something that is erroneous, or from anyone, then, make your contribution in correcting any misinformation with verifiable info.

As to your concerns about your grades, I will, of course, discuss any of your questions via e-mail and, if the matter is a generalized concern, I will post any clarifications in my **Instructor's Add-ons (follow-up) file.**

While grades are an understandable concern, please be reassured that I am open to constructive, confidential e-mail discussions as to a fair grade regarding your various efforts. So try not to stress over them too, too much. While most of our email communication will occur through the course's formatted system, more confidential matters can be communicated via my other email address: [Richard.Patrick00@gmail.com](mailto:Richard.Patrick00@gmail.com).

### **Paper Assignments**

A research 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 date.

To re-emphasize, the guidelines indicated above for discussion postings concerning critical thinking, logic, verifiable facts, etc. also apply to the paper assignments.

**VI. Other college policies and standards**

For information on the college academic policies and your “due process” as a student, please check out the following link as well as note these other provisions.

<http://mxcc.edu/catalog/academic-policies>

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.”

## VII. 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 can 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.

## VIII. Main Course Study Requirements

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

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

3. Be aware that some of the ideas/info from postings and especially the Instructor’s Add-ons will later reappear in some variation in the exam questions. Taking notes from other student comments of our shared discussion postings 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

For difficulties in reading assignments due to computer formatting, I suggest that you call the Distance Learning at 860-343-5756 for assistance in these technical difficulties.

## IX. Instructor Communication and Contact

Most weekly course communication should be through the “Announcements” file on the Home page and course email system. I will endeavor to respond to your general messages within 24-48 hours. There will be an opportunity prior to the exams for on-campus, voluntary, review with classmates which I post in Announcements as to when and where.

Graded assessment on assignments, and particularly exams, will be posted in your Grade book. Your discussion postings scores are indicated with the posting.

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.

X, On being currently 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 "News Hour" 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. There, too, more conservative news sources such as Fox News and The National Review for other views.

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.

## **COURSE TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

**1. Recognizing politics:** reading: “Defining Politics” in E-Reserve file and instructor’s posted lecture on politics

Learning objectives:

- 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
- 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 objectives:

- 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 objectives:

- 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 objectives:

- 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 objectives:

- 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 objectives:

- 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 symbolism presidential leadership**

Reading: Chapter 9, and instructor’s posted lectures

Learning objectives:

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

### **11. Presidents in warmaking and diplomacy**

Learning objectives:

- a. identify the beliefs in a president’s ideology of military interventionism
- b. identify applications of “soft power” in presidents’ foreign policy

### **12. Presidents’ personality, character styles, and governing**

**FINAL EXAM**