American Government and Politics
POL 205-810

Course Description: This course is an introduction to the American political system, including the Constitutional framework: legislative, executive, and judicial functions; as well as the nature of American political parties, interest groups, public opinion, social movements, the media, and the role each plays in contemporary American life.

Instructional Process: Instruction will involve a lecture format and the utilization of multiple tracks or sources. Each track will be linked overall but yet independent from the other tracks. The text constitutes only one track. The class lecture (with notes) comprise another track. Films and videos constitute a third track. A fourth track is comprised of the book *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity*. A fifth track consists of magazine articles and any other form of readings assigned and placed on the class web site, on e-reserve on the Penfield Library’s website, or sent by e-mail as an attachment. The student will be responsible for all of the material of each source.

Professor: Dr. Michael Ruddy    Text: *The Struggle for Democracy*, Greenberg & Page


Office Hours: Monday afternoons by appointment and walk-in hours Wednesday 1:30-2:45 pm.

Office Location: Room 212 Mahar    Mail: Political Science Department, 435 Mahar Hall

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Important: e-mail is the course’s primary mode of communication

Telephones: During Office Hours: 312-3414    Political Science Department: 312-2350 (leave message)

Course Objectives: Students will be able to:

(1) Know the terminology, definitions, and basic functions of the American system of government;

(2) Know the elements of a systems approach to the study of political science;

(3) Demonstrate research skills necessary for the study of politics and public policy;

(4) Know the major issues facing the American political system;

(5) Know the nature of the American political culture;

(6) Recognize the role of power and citizen participation in the American political system as well as the impact of non-participation;
(7) Appraise, on the basis of readings, discussions, and reflection, the strengths and weaknesses of the American political system;

(8) Recognize the impact of the media upon American politics and the responsibilities of the media in a democratic political system; and

(9) Demonstrate an understanding of the role of political efficacy as a component of solving American social and economic problems.

**Student Requirements:**

(1) **Attendance:** Attendance is taken at every class. Each student is expected to attend every class. Students are allowed two absences before five points for each absence are deducted from the attendance/participation point total. Students experiencing attendance problems must consult with the instructor. Acquiring information or fulfilling work missed by the student due to absences is the sole responsibility of the student. Any assistance from the instructor regarding such materials, information, or exercises (including missed tests) is to be dealt with during office hours.

(2) **Tardiness:** Students are expected to be on time for class. Students arriving after attendance has been taken are charged as one-half an authorized absence. Students who have used their two allotted absences are charged two points from their total grade for each tardiness. Students missing more than half the class are charged proportionately at the instructor’s discretion. The first five minutes of each class often contain important procedural announcements which the student must know.

(3) **Early Departure:** Any student who departs class without permission after having signed in and before the instruction has concluded will be required for the remainder of the semester to sign in at the end of class in the presence of the instructor to be counted as having attended the class.

(4) **Conduct:** Despite the tendency in recent public forums to foster confrontational and rude behavior during discussions and debates, our class discussions will require that all students be treated and will respond with the respect and courteous conduct essential to the practice of democracy.

(5) **Attentiveness:** Students must be fully attentive at all times. Inattentive students will be encouraged publicly to conform to class norms; i.e., no talking during lecture, no use of cell phones, audio devices, and no sleeping. There will be two warnings; a third violation the student will be asked to leave class.

(6) **Cheating:** No form of cheating will be tolerated. Students involved as either the initiator or the accomplice will receive no credit for the quiz or exam. Any student found cheating will be required to take all remaining exams and quizzes in a more closely-monitored setting determined by instructor.

(7) **Laptop Computer Usage:** Students are permitted to bring computers to class for the purpose of taking notes only. **Students using computers must sit in the first row of the class.** Anyone found using their laptops for instant messaging or other unauthorized network-based computer activities during the class lecture or during a media presentations will be charged five (5) points as an absence for their inattentiveness, in other words, lack of participation.
Evaluation:

Testing: There are three regular tests covering the preceding lessons, including the primary text readings, class notes, lectures, secondary text readings, current events articles and videos. Questions are all multiple choice. The third test is administered with the final exam. Absence from a test requires either permission prior to the absence or an excuse from a medical professional, written on medical script. Tests missed must be made up during office hours within one week of return to class.


Current Events Questions: Each week current events articles will be placed on the course’s website, or on the library’s e-reserve web site, or sent by e-mail as an attachment.

Final Exam: The test is valued at 100 points. The test is divided into two sections; sixty multiple choice review questions (1 point each), and twenty broad cumulative/overview questions (2 points each). The final exam is administered during the time set forth in the exam schedule.

Class Participation: Each student is expected to take notes and to contribute to the discussions of the class in a constructive manner (see “Conduct” below). This means reading the required material before class and participating in any discussions, debates, or teacher inquiries.

Point Values:

| Test # 1 | 40 points. |
| Test # 2 | 60 points. |
| Test # 3 | 70 points. |
| Participation/Attendance | 30 points |
| Final Exam | 100 points |
| **Total** | **300 points** |

Note: Each test potentially includes questions from each of the sources or tracks.

Grades:

| 280-300 = A | 270-279 = A- |
| 260-269 = B+ | 250-259 = B |
| 230-239 = C+ | 220-229 = C |
| 200-209 = D+ | 190-199 = D |
| 180-189 = D- | 0-179 = E |

Disabilities: Any student diagnosed during elementary or secondary school as having a disability, a learning disability, or if you have not been diagnosed but you believe you are experiencing inexplicable or inordinate difficulty, you should refer to the Disability Services website.
Important Notice

Website Notes: There will be an effort to post the basic outline of the class notes on this course’s section of the website:

www.oswego.edu/~ruddy

However; this accommodation should not be seen as a substitute for taking notes during class. In the event that the notes are not placed on the website or if there is a technology failure which prohibits access to the website edition of the notes, no steps will be taken to either offer an alternative source of the notes or to alter or postpone testing. In short, attend class, take notes, and use the website notes as merely a check on your own note taking or for emergencies.

Schedule of Classes

Week One


Week Two
Monday– February 4 – (1) Lecture Topic: The Constitution; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 3: Federalism: States and Nation [1st half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings, 1, 19 & 20; (4) Current Events Readings: Article # 1.

Wednesday– February 6 – (1) Lecture Topic: The Origins of Federalism; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 3: Federalism: States and Nation [2nd half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings #2, & 3.

Week Three
Monday– February 11 – (1) Lecture Topic: Federalism in the 21st Century; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 1: Democracy and American Politics [1st half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings # 4, 5, 6 & 18; (4) Current Events Readings: Article # 2.

Wednesday– February 13 – (1) Lecture Topic: Grass Roots Movements in American History; Reading assignment for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 1: Democracy and American Politics [2nd half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings #7 & 14.

Week Four
Monday– February 18 – (1) Lecture Topic: The Civil Rights Movement—An Exercise in Democracy; Reading assignment for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 4: The Structure and Foundations of American Government and Politics [1st half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings #57, 58, 59 & 60. (4)
Current Events Readings: Article # 3.

**Wednesday– February 20** – (1) Lecture Topic: Who Are We?; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 4: *The Structure and Foundations of American Government and Politics* [2nd half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings #79 & 81.

**Week Five**

**Monday– February 25** – (1) Lecture Topic: Diversity in American History– A Novel View; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 5: *Public Opinion* [1st half]; (3) Current Events Readings: Article # 4.

**Wednesday– February 27** – (1) First Test: Greenberg & Page, Chapters 1, 2, 3 & 4 and all Serow & Ladd readings to date and Current Events readings #1, 2, & 3; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 5: *Public Opinion* [2nd half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings # 61 & 82.

**Week Six**

**Monday– March 4** – (1) Lecture Topic: Public Opinion in American Political History; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 6: *The Mass Media* [1st half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings # 62, 63, 64 & 65. (4) Current Events Readings: Article # 5.

**Wednesday– March 6** – (1) Lecture Topic: The Role of Media in a Democracy; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 6: *The Mass Media* [2nd half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings # 79 & 80.

**Week Seven**

**Monday–March 11** – (1) Lecture Topic: Challenges to Journalism in the 21st Century; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 7: *Interest Groups and Corporations* [1st half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings # 51, 52, 53 & 54. (4) Current Events Readings: Article # 6.

**Wednesday– March 13** – (2) Lecture Topic: Interest Groups in Today’s Political Environment; Reading assignments for next class: (3) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 7: *Interest Groups and Corporations* [2nd Half]; (4) Serow & Ladd, Readings #55, & 22.

**Week Eight**

**Monday– March 18** – No class Spring Recess

**Wednesday – March 20** – No class Spring Recess

**Week Nine**

**Monday– March 25** – (1) Lecture Topic: Reform of Interest Group Interaction with Elected Officials; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 8: *Social Movements* [1st half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings – To Be Assigned, (4) Current Events Readings: Article # 7.

**Wednesday– March 27** – (1) Lecture Topic: Social Movements in U.S. History; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 8: *Social Movements* [2nd Half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings – To Be Assigned.
Week Ten
Monday– April 1 – (1) Lecture Topic: Isolationism and Other Anti-War Movements; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 9: Political Parties [1st half].

Wednesday– April 3 – (1) Lecture Topic: The History of the Political Party System; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 9: Political Parties [2nd Half]; (4) Serow & Ladd, Readings – To Be Assigned.

Week Eleven
Monday– April 8 – (1) Lecture Topic: A History of Voter Disenfranchisement; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 10: Participation, Voting and Elections [1st half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings – To Be Assigned; (4) Current Events Readings: Article # 8.

Wednesday–April 10 – (1) Lecture Topic: How Do We Protect the Right to Vote?; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 10: Participation, Voting and Elections [2nd half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings – To Be Assigned.

Week Twelve
Monday– April 15 – (1) Lecture Topic: Electoral Reform in A Partisan Environment; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 11: Congress [1st half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings – To Be Assigned; (4) Current Events Readings: Article # 9.

Wednesday– April 17 – (1) (A) Lecture Topic: Congress and the Framers’ Intent (B) How Congress Works; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 11: Congress [2nd half]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings – To Be Assigned.

Week Thirteen
Monday– April 22 – (1) Second Test: Greenberg & Page, Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10 and all Serow & Ladd from Week 5 through Week 12, and Current Events readings #4, 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 12: The President [Whole Chapter]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings – To Be Assigned; (4) Current Events Readings: Article # 10.

Wednesday– April 24 – (1) Lecture Topic: The History of the Office of the President; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 13: The Federal Bureaucracy [Whole Chapter]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings – To Be Assigned.

Week Fourteen
Monday– April 29 – (1) Lecture Topic: The Executive Branch; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 14: The Courts [Whole Chapter]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings – To Be Assigned; (4) Current Events Readings: Article # 11.

Wednesday– May 1 – (1) Lecture Topic: The Supreme Court and the Federal Court System; Reading assignments for next class: (2) Chapter 15: The Struggle for Civil Liberties [Whole Chapter]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings – To Be Assigned.

Week Fifteen
Monday– May 6 – (1) Lecture Topic: The Challenge to Civil Rights and Civil Liberties During a War
Effort: Reading assignments for third test: (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 16: *Civil Rights: The Struggle for Political Equality* [Whole Chapter]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings – To Be Assigned; (4) Current Events Readings: Article # 12.

**Wednesday– May 8** – Review for Final Exam

**Additional Reading assignments for third test:** (2) Greenberg & Page, Chapter 18: *Foreign Policy and National Defense* [Whole Chapter]; (3) Serow & Ladd, Readings – To Be Assigned.

**Week Sixteen**

**Monday, May 13 – Friday, May 17** – Exams

**Important Note!**

The Third Test will be part of the final exam, that is, attached to the front of the exam as a separate testing instrument. Though you will be responsible for the materials covered, none of the materials covered since the Third Test will be in the review segments of the Final Exam.