With a bitter battle between parties over control of Congress in the works and the Presidential Election of 2016 beginning to shape up there is quite a bit of political power at stake in the coming months. Elections are a key moment in our democratic political system and how they unfold is a topic of interest to many players in the political system. This course looks closely at the processes we use to organize citizen participation and choose political leadership. We examine several enduring electoral trouble spots, evaluate the merits of a variety of reform proposals, and consider how they might influence the American political process. The rules that structure political decisions, both in elections and by elected leaders, influence the behavior of all the participants and have significant implications for the quality of public participation and representation in our democracy.

TEXTS
There are no required books. All required readings and resources are on Blackboard.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
(1) Knowledge of the historical roots and political institutions that contribute to current election practices
(2) An understanding of the opportunities and obstacles for change in the rules and practices associated with elections
(3) An understanding of the democratic values associated with the conduct of elections and how those values are connected and related
(4) The ability to analyze and assess the strengths and weaknesses of proposals designed to reform elections
(5) Appreciation of the benefits of cooperative work and group problem solving

ACADEMIC HONESTY:
It is essential that students understand, appreciate and model the highest standards of academic integrity. The University’s policy regarding what constitutes plagiarism and the penalty is available at http://www.albany.edu/eas/104/penalty.htm There is also a useful tutorial available at the University library website that can clarify the issue and provide strategies and best practices to avoid it http://library.albany.edu/usered/ncplaga/index.html
Violations of academic integrity will be reported to the Office of Undergraduate Education and will result in failure of this course.

READING ASSIGNMENTS
Due to the format of the course, students should read through as much of the Background and Problem reading in each unit before we start our class discussions of the topic. The Readiness Assessment Tests (RAT) will always cover material only in the Background and Problem portion of that section of the course. The Solutions, Partner profiles and the debrief will use material from the Solutions folder in each course area and will build on the understanding developed in the readings and discussion of the background. The dates below are suggested so that you can get the most out of our discussions on each topic.
Nominating Candidates for Office  (Readiness Assessment Test: August 29)
Readings: Syllabus, Nominating Candidates Background folder by August 27
Readings: Nominating Candidates Solutions Folder by Sept 5

Choosing How Legislative Districts are Drawn (Readiness Assessment Test: Sept 26)
Readings: Choosing Background and Problem Readings by Sept 15
Readings: Choosing Solutions by September 29

Election Administration (Readiness Assessment Test: October 17)
Readings: Election Administration Background/Problems by October 13
Readings: Election Administration Solutions by October 22

Funding Political Campaigns (Readiness Assessment Test: November 14)
Readings: Campaign Finance Background/Problems by November 10
Readings: Campaign Finance Solutions by November 19

Civic Engagement (Readiness Assessment Test: December 5)
Readings: Civic Engagement Background/Problems and Solutions by December 1

COMPONENTS OF GRADES
There will be three major areas that contribute to course grades: Individual Performance, Group Performance and Team Contribution.

Individual Performance: There are three components to the individual portion of the grade. There will be five short, multiple choice Readiness Assessment Tests (RATs) given during the course. They will occur close to the beginning of each reform unit (see schedule above) and cover only the material from the introduction and discussion of the problem associated with the reform. Each student will also complete a short, in class reflection at the end of the each unit. There will also be a final take home exam due December 18th that will be based on individual work. I will distribute the choices for that essay during our last class meeting.

Group Performance: The same RATs that are given to individuals will be completed by the teams in class directly after their individual administration. In addition, each team will prepare a partner profile for the rest of the team by signing up to explore one of the reform groups that contribute political solutions. On pre-determined dates across the semester we will have presentations about these partners in teams and in class. During the Solutions phase of each reform discussion, teams will complete cooperative solutions to the reform problems which will be evaluated by the instructor, other teams, and perhaps outside guests.

Team Contribution: Each individual will rate the helpfulness of all of the other members of their team mid-semester and at the final class meeting. The mid-semester evaluation will be advisory, only the final Team Contribution rating will count. Scores will be the average of the points each student receives from the members of their team. Assuming arbitrarily that (1) team contribution is worth 10 points, and (2) that there are six members on a team, an example of this procedure would be as follows: Each individual must assign a total of 50 points to the other five members in their team. Raters must differentiate some in their ratings by assigning a group mate at least one score of 11 or higher – with a maximum of 15—and at least one score of 9 or lower). As a result, it is very likely that Team Contribution scores will produce differences in grades within teams.
Grade Weights: these percentages will be determined for the whole class by team representatives (acting in consultation with their team) in class on 9/12

Grade Weights and %
Within area of Total

Individual Performance (minimum = 30%)

- Individual RAT scores 50%
- Individual Debrief reflections 10%
- Election Crystal Ball 5%
- Final Paper 40%

Group Performance (minimum = 20%)

- Team Readiness Assessments 50%
- Partner Profiles 10%
- Choosing Political Candidates 10%
- Drawing Legislative Districts 10%
- Election Administration 10%
- Funding Political Campaigns 10%
- Civic Engagement 5%

Team Contribution (Evaluated by team peers only, minimum = 10%)

In class exercises (in class work and reading readiness work, minimum= 10%)

DETERMINATION OF FINAL GRADES:
The final grades will be determined as follows: 1) a raw total score will be computed for each student in each major performance area: in the individual performance area, this will be weighted combination of the sum of the individual RATS, the debrief reflections, and the final paper score; in the team performance area, this will be the sum of the scores on each of the graded team assignments and the team’s average score for the partner profiles; the Team Contribution score will be an average of the peer evaluations received from all members of a student’s team, 2) Students’ total scores will be computed by multiplying the raw scores in each area by the grade “weight” set by the class (see above), 3) Course grades will be based on each individual’s standing in the overall distribution of total individual scores within the class.

Choosing Political Candidates (and Parties)
8/25 Orientation to the Course – Introduction to the Nomination process
8/27 Discussion of Nomination Process – Nomination Problem Folder
8/29 RAT – Unit #1
9/1 *** no class ***
9/3 Solutions discussion - Nomination Solutions Folder
9/5 Solutions discussion * partner profile presentations
9/8 Work on exercise
9/10 Solution presentations
9/12 Solutions set course weights, debrief
Choosing How Legislative Districts are Drawn
9/15    Redistricting Introduction
9/17    Redistricting Problem Discussion
9/19    Redistricting Problem Discussion
9/22    RAT - Unit #2
9/24    Redistricting Solutions
9/26    *** no class ***
9/29    Redistricting Solutions  * partner profile presentations
10/1    work on exercise
10/3    Solutions presentations
10/6    Solutions presentations
10/8    *** no class, Mid-semester Course and Team Evaluations debrief ***

Election Administration
10/10    Election Administration Problem Introduction
10/13    Election Administration Problem Discussion
10/15    Election Administration Problem Discussion
10/17    RAT – Unit #3
10/20    Discussion of Election Administration Solutions
10/22    Discussion of Election Administration Solutions * partner profile presentations
10/24    Discussion of Election Administration Solutions
10/27    work on exercise
10/29    Solutions presentation
10/31    Solutions presentation, Election 2014 Crystal ball,
11/3    Election 2014 Crystal Ball
11/5    Election discussion
11/7    *** no class, debrief ***

Funding Political Campaigns
11/10    Campaign Finance Introduction
11/12    Campaign Finance Problem Discussion
11/14    RAT – Unit #4
11/17    Discussion of Campaign Finance Solutions
11/19    Discussion of Campaign Finance Solutions * partner profile presentations
11/21    work on exercise
11/24    Solutions presentations, debrief
11/26    *** no class ***
11/28    *** no class ***

Civic Engagement
12/1    Civic Engagement Problem Introduction
12/3    Civic Engagement Problem Discussion  * partner profile presentations
12/5    RAT – Unit # 5
12/8    Final Group Evaluations, Take Home Distributed, in class debrief
12/17   High Noon - Final Essay Due HU16