RPOS 322 (9542) and RPAD 322 (9541): The Government and Politics of New York City  
Fall 2018, 3 Credits

Class Meetings  
Days and Times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:45 to 4:05 pm (August 27 to December 10 except no classes on September 3 [Labor Day], September 10 [Rosh Hashanah], September 19 [Yom Kippur]; and November 21 [Thanksgiving Break])  
Location: Humanities Building, Room 020

Final Exam  
Day and Time: Thursday, December 13, from 3:30 to 5:30 pm  
Location: Humanities Building, Room 020

Office Hours  
Days and Times: Wednesdays, 4:30 to 5:30 pm (August 29 to December 12 except no office hours on September 19 [Yom Kippur] or November 21 [Thanksgiving Break])  
Location: Rockefeller College Contact Office, Humanities Building, Room 016

Instructor  
Frank J. Mauro, Public Service Professor and adjunct Lecturer  
Contact Information: You can contact me by e-mail at fjmauro@albany.edu. If you do not receive an e-mail response in a reasonable amount of time, you can call me at 518-346-3122. If I am not in when you call, please leave a message.

Course Description (from the Undergraduate Bulletin):  
Introduction to New York City’s major political and governmental institutions, with an emphasis on the recurring efforts:
  • To provide for borough and community input into the city’s policy making and implementation processes; and
  • To increase inter- and intra-party competition.

Student Learning Objectives:  
The instructor's objectives are for each participating student to—
  • Develop a good understanding of the political and governmental institutions and processes through which the residents of New York City govern themselves
  • Become familiar with the major sources of information that are available regarding the workings of New York City's major political and governmental institutions and processes
  • Be able to explain current developments involving New York City's political and governmental institutions in theoretical and historical context.

Reasonable Accommodations for Students with Documented Disabilities:  
Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of the Disability Resource Center (Campus Center 130, 518-442-5490, DRC@albany.edu). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations.
**Academic Integrity:**
Every student is responsible for following the University’s standards of academic integrity which are posted at:
https://www.albany.edu/graduatebulletin/requirements_degree.htm#standards_integrity
https://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html
http://library.albany.edu/infolit/integrity
Ignorance of the standards, unintentional error, and/or personal or academic pressures are not acceptable reasons for violation of these standards. Please take the time to review these standards.

**Course Materials:** All readings are available via the Blackboard site for this course.

**Course Requirements:** Each student in this class is responsible for:
- Completing all required readings prior to the class meeting at which those readings are scheduled for discussion; and actively participating in class discussions of those readings
- Regularly monitoring one or more newspapers (and/or one or more comparable electronic news services) that cover New York City government and politics on a regular basis; and actively participating in class discussions of current developments involving New York City government and politics based on this monitoring
- Identifying particularly insightful and/or informative news articles related to New York City government and politics and submitting copies of those articles along with comments and/or questions about (and/or related to) the information in those articles.
  - Submitting one such article during each of at least four of the following five groups of weeks: (1) the weeks of September 3, 10 and 17; (2) the weeks of September 24 and October 1 and 8; (3) October 15, 22 and 29; (4) the weeks of November 5, 12 and 19; and (5) the weeks of November 26, and December 3.
- Making a well-organized five-minute classroom presentation on the basis of one of these submissions and distributing a 1-page handout that summarizes the key points in your presentation in an easy to scan format. To assist me in scheduling these presentations, let me know at least one class in advance when you are ready to make your presentation. Also, provide your handout to me for duplication at least one class before your presentation once we have scheduled it.

**Agenda for Class Meetings:** To the maximum extent possible, the agenda for each class meeting will include the following components in the following order:
- Instructor announcements (if any) regarding class administration matters
- Student questions (if any) regarding class administration matters
- Student comments/questions (if any) on current developments regarding New York City government and politics
- Instructor and student comments/questions (if any) on sources of information regarding the workings of New York City's major political and governmental institutions and processes
- Student comments/questions regarding the readings, if any, that are scheduled for discussion during this class meeting
- Instructor presentations, if any, scheduled for this class meeting
- Instructor comments on upcoming classes
Grading for this course will be on an A through E grading scale including pluses and minuses with A for Excellent, B for Good, C for Fair, D for Poor, and E for Failure. The grade of E is a failing grade and can not be used to fulfill graduation requirements. The weightings for the various course requirements are:

- Attendance and participation with an emphasis on the quality of comments and questions on reading assignments – 25%
- Four news article comment/question submissions – 16%
- Classroom presentation and handout based on one of the news article submissions – 9%
- Mid-Term Exam (Wednesday, October 10) - 25%
- Final Exam (Thursday, December 13) - 25%

Class Schedule

August 27:
- Overview of course requirements
- Introduction to the substance of the material to be covered in the course
- Explanation of the ways in which the course will look at current proposals in addition to past and present developments in order to understand and evaluate the recurring efforts to (a) provide for borough and community input into the New York City government’s policy making and implementation processes; and (b) increase inter- and intra-party electoral competition.
- The current proposals that we will look at in detail are based on the five broad policy areas that are the focus of the Charter Revision Commission appointed earlier this year by New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio:
  - Campaign Finance
  - Municipal Elections (including Ranked Choice Voting)
  - Civic Engagement
  - Community Boards
  - The Drawing of City Council districts after each decennial census
- In addition to looking at past developments in each of those five areas, we will also look at past developments in five other areas
  - The increases and decreases over time in the authority of the Borough Presidents
  - The opening up of the process for filling vacancies in NYC elected offices
  - New York City’s experience with “Proportional Representation” (1938 to 1949) and “Limited Nomination and Limited Voting” (1964 to 1983)
  - The debate over and the ultimate defeat of proposals for non-partisan elections
  - The reduction in the size of City Council districts
  - School system centralization, decentralization, and centralization again
- What is the City Charter? What is the “charter revision” process?

August 29:
- Overview of the basic structure of the “mayor-council” form of local government that has been in place in New York City since 1990 as a result of the changes developed and refined by the 1987-88 and 1989 charter revision commissions, proposed by the 1989 Charter Revision Commission and adopted by the voters of the city at the November 1989 election.
- Introduction to the basic geography of New York City
September 5:
• The current NYC Charter Revision Processes
• The issues highlighted by the Charter Revision Commission created by Mayor de Blasio earlier this year
• Where does this Commission’s work stand? What proposals if any will it be presenting to the voters of this city at this November’s general election?
• In preparation for this class, familiarize yourself with the materials available on this Commission’s website. https://www1.nyc.gov/site/charter/index.page
• Watch the video (or read the transcript) of this Commission’s August 14, 2018, meeting
• Find (on the “Reports” tab on the Commission website) and read the resolution adopted by this Commission at its August 14, 2018, meeting.
• Find (on that same “Reports” tab) and read the first 17 pages of the “2018 Preliminary Staff Report” and skim the rest of this report which we will be reading for later classes.

September 12:
• New York City Mayors and New York City mayoral elections.
• In preparation for this class, view the videos and read the materials which are posted in the Blackboard folder on “Mayors and Mayoral Elections”

September 17:
• The enlarged and empowered City Council in the post-1989 “mayor-council” system.
• In preparation for this class, read the articles posted in the Blackboard folder on “Separation of Powers; and Checks & Balances.”

September 24 and 26:
• Political Parties in New York City
• The role of fusion candidacies in NYC elections (particularly important in mayoral elections)
• The pros and cons of New York State’s multi-party system. Is the New York Times correct when it editorializes that we now have too many parties on the ballot in New York?
• In regard to the promotion of intra-party competition, we will compare the way vacancies in the state legislature are filled with the new process for filling vacancies in NYC elected offices that was adopted by the voters of the city in 1988
• In preparation for this week’s classes, read the articles posted in the Blackboard folder on “Political Parties”

October 1 and 3:
• Campaign Finance Issues and Reform Proposals
• The political origins of New York City’s system of public campaign financing
• Changes in the NYC system since it was initially established
• Evaluations of the current system
• Current reform proposals being advanced by the 2018 Charter Revision Commission
• Current reform proposals not being advanced by the 2018 Charter Revision Commission
• In preparation for this week’s classes, read the materials posted in the Blackboard folder on “Campaign Finance.”

October 8:
• Review session for Mid-Term Exam
October 10:
• Mid-Term Exam

October 15 and 17:
• Community Boards
• The components of the system of community governance established by the 1975 charter
• How this system of community governance has worked (and changed) since 1975
• Reform proposals being advanced currently by the 2018 Charter Revision Commission
• Reform proposals not being advanced currently by the 2018 Charter Revision Commission
• In preparation for this week’s classes, read the materials posted in the Blackboard folder on “Community Boards”

October 22 and 24:
• The structure and operations of the City Council
• Has the enlarging of the council (i.e., from 35 to 51 districts) in 1989 made it more representative? Are the smaller districts more competitive?
• What has been the impact of the more independent redistricting process (which was also adopted in 1989)? Is there a case to be made for additional changes in the districting process?
• What has been the impact of the addition of “term limits” (by voter initiative in 1993)?
• In preparation for this week’s classes, read the materials posted in the Blackboard folder on the “City Council”

October 29 and 31:
• NYC Municipal Elections
• The current Charter Revision Commission has focused on the problem of low voter turnout and looked at various mechanisms for increasing voter registration and voter participation.
• For changes like “early voting” and “same day registration,” it appears that the intertwining of elections for local and state offices on the same ballots means that changes of this type really need to be done at the state level.
• The Commission’s proposals for providing additional language access services
• The Commission’s recommendation for additional study of proposals for “ranked choice voting” (which is also referred to as “instant runoff voting”)
• In the NYC context, an additional argument for “ranked choice voting” is that it would better serve the objectives of the NYS law which requires run-off elections in political party primaries for citywide elected offices in NYC if no candidate receives at least 40% of the votes cast. But the presence of that state law also means that ranked choice voting for NYC’s three citywide elected offices (Mayor, Public Advocate and Comptroller) would in all likelihood require action by the state legislature.
• In preparation for this week’s classes, read the materials posted in the Blackboard folders on “Election Modernization” and “Ranked Choice Voting”

November 5 and 7:
• Civic Engagement
• The current Charter Revision Commission is recommending the creation of a Civic Engagement Commission “to promote civic participation and engagement by residents of New York City.”
• In preparation for this week’s classes, read the materials posted in the Blackboard folder on “Civic Engagement”
November 12 and 14:
• The boroughs and the Borough Presidents (BPs)
• The creation, by the 1897 Charter, of the boroughs as entities and the Borough Presidencies
• The subsequent “revolt of the boroughs” which led to the 1901 charter revision which gave the BPs individually responsibility for public works in their boroughs and gave the BPs a citywide role by making them members of the Board of Estimate which functioned as New York City’s most powerful governing body from 1902 to 1989
• An Open Question: Did the elimination of the Board of Estimate by the 1989 Charter eliminate the logic for the continued existence of the Borough Presidencies?
• In preparation for this week’s classes, read the materials posted in the Blackboard folder on “Borough Representation.”

November 19:
• Nonpartisan elections
• The origins of Mayor Bloomberg’s support for nonpartisan elections
• The evolution of the Mayor’s proposal and its ultimate defeat by the voters in 2003.
• In preparation for this week’s classes, read the materials posted in the Blackboard folder on the “Nonpartisan Elections Debate”

November 26 and 28.
• Efforts to increase minority party representation
• New York City’s experience with “Proportional Representation” (1937 to 1949)
• How PR worked and how the persistent efforts to kill PR finally succeeded
• New York’s experience with Limited Nomination and Limited Voting
• In preparation for this week’s classes, read the materials posted in the Blackboard folder on “Proportional Representation”

December 3 and 5:
• New York City’s experience with community school districts with elected school boards
• How did Mayor Bloomberg succeed in securing state legislation establishing mayoral control of the New York City school system when his immediate predecessors (Ed Koch and Rudy Giuliani) had both failed in similar quests?
• How has mayoral control worked under mayors Bloomberg and de Blasio?
• Why has the state legislature been less willing to authorize mayoral control during Mayor de Blasio’s time in office (so far granting him only one and two year extensions of mayoral control) than it was during Mayor Bloomberg’s time in office (granting him two consecutive 7-year authorizations)?
• In preparation for this week’s classes, read the materials posted in the Blackboard folder on “School Governance”

December 10:
• Review session for Final Exam

Thursday, December 13 from 3:30 to 5:30 pm:
• Final Exam

This syllabus prepared by Frank J. Mauro, August 2018.