

University at Albany, State University of New York

RPOS 399 (6317): Selected Topics in American Politics: The Government and Politics of New York City

Spring 2011, Tuesday, 5:45 pm to 8:35 pm, Earth Science 245

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Use mauro399@yahoo.com for submitting class assignments, assignment-related questions and other substantive questions. Use fjmauro@albany.edu for scheduling appointments and for other administrative matters. If you have not gotten a response to an e-mail request or question in a reasonable amount of time, call me at home at 518-346-3122. If no one answers, leave a message on the voice mail.

I. Course Description

This section of RPOS 399 will cover the origins, evolution and functioning of New York City's major political and governmental institutions, with an emphasis on:

- The recurring efforts to provide for greater local input into the city government's policy making processes without undoing the results of the 1898 consolidation that created the current five-borough city; and
- The attempts to increase inter-party and intra-party electoral competition in a city that is overwhelmingly Democratic in its political preferences.

Among the specific developments to be examined are

- The growth and decline of the borough presidents' power;
- The establishment (1901) and elimination (1989) of the Board of Estimate with borough representation;
- The establishment and institutionalization of the community board system;
- The creation and later elimination of community school boards;
- The establishment in 2002 and the functioning, since then, of Mayoral control of the NYC school system;

- The decline in recent decades in the power of New York City’s political “machines;”
- The “reform” movement of the Post-World War II era;
- The periodic efforts of “reformers” within the Democratic Party, “good government” groups and Republican to join together in “fusion” campaigns against Tammany Hall and its counterparts in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx;
- The efforts over time to make structural changes in the electoral system (such as the use of proportional representation from 1937 through 1949) to reduce the influence of the Democratic Party and particularly its county leaders;
- The establishment of an independent redistricting process and the functioning of that process following the decennial censuses of 1990 and 2000; and
- The establishment and workings of a system of public campaign financing for the election of city government officials.

II. Course Objectives

The instructor's objectives are for each participating student to

- (1) Develop a good understanding of the political and governmental institutions and processes through which the residents of New York City govern themselves,
- (2) 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, and
- (3) Be able to place current developments involving New York City's political and governmental institutions in their proper theoretical and historical context.

III. Course Meetings

This section of RPOS 399 will meet from 5:45 pm to 8:35 pm in Earth Science 245 on Tuesday evenings during the Spring 2011 semester except February 22nd and April 19th.

IV. Course Readings.

The first three books listed below are available for purchase at both (1) the University Bookstore in the Campus Center and (2) Mary Jane Books, 215 Western Avenue, at the corner of Western Avenue and Quail Street, near the downtown campus.

In addition to the materials listed below, copies of other readings (or links to electronic versions of other readings) will be distributed in class or via e-mail. If you do not check your University at Albany e-mail address on a regular basis, please provide the instructor with an e-mail address that you do check regularly.

Berg, Bruce F., *New York City Politics: Governing Gotham*, Rutgers University Press, 2007, ISBN: 978-0-8135-4191-4.

Kivelson, Adrienne, *What Makes New York City Run? A Citizen's Guide to How City Government Works*, League of Women Voters of the City of New York, 2001, ISBN 0-916130-02—9

Francis S. Barry, *The Scandal of Reform, The Grand Failures of New York's Political Crusaders and the Death of Nonpartisanship*, Rutgers University Press, 2009, ISBN 978-0-8135-4467-6.

New York City Charter. The full text of the New York City Charter is available electronically in HTML via the last link on the "Laws of New York" page at <http://public.leginfo.state.ny.us/menuf.cgi>

V. Course Requirements

A. Completion of all required readings prior to the class at which those readings are scheduled for discussion.

B. Completion of all assignments on a timely basis.

C. Regular monitoring of a newspaper or a website that covers New York City government and politics on a regular basis. Submit your choice to the instructor via e-mail by January 31, 2011. Identify articles that deal with class topics and submit those to the instructor by **the Monday prior to the class at which you will be prepared to discuss the article in class.** Each student in the class is required to submit at least one article for discussion during each of the following four groups

of class meetings: (1) Feb. 1, 8 and 15; (2) March 1, 8 and 15, (3) March 22 and 29 and April 5, and (4) April 12 and 26, and May 3.

D. Attendance at all course meetings and contribution to class discussions on the basis of the required readings and other assignments.

VI. Grading

Attendance, class participation and completion of all newspaper assignments	15%
Writing Assignment #1	10%
Writing Assignments #2, #3 and #4 – 25% each	75%
Final Exam	25%

VII. Schedule of Topics for Class Discussion and related Assignments

January 25. Overview of course and course requirements.

February 1, 8 and 15. A big picture introduction to the origins, evolution and functioning of New York City's major governmental institutions. Read *What Makes New York City Run?* By February 7, prepare and submit a 3-page paper explaining the governmental institution or process that you are assigned to cover including the discussion of one or more important developments, since 2001, involving that institution or process. Potential sources of information for these papers include relevant material from Berg, *New York City Politics: Governing Gotham* including sources referenced in that book as well as material from newspapers and websites that cover New York City government and politics. Be prepared to discuss, in class on February 8 and 15, the governmental institution or process that you have been assigned to cover.

February 15. A big picture introduction to the forces influencing the governance of New York City (the need and the desire to promote economic growth; the city's relationships with state and federal governments; and, the city's racial and ethnic diversity) and a more in depth discussion of the "economic development imperative." Read and be prepared to discuss chapters 1, 2 and 10 in Berg, ***New York City Politics: Governing Gotham***.

March 1 and 8. The roles of racial and ethnic diversity in New York City government and politics. The roles and functioning of political parties in the government and politics of New York City. Read and be prepared to discuss chapters 5 and 6 in Berg, ***New York City Politics: Governing Gotham***. Read and be prepared to discuss chapters 1 through 7 in Barry, ***The Scandal of Reform***. By March 11, submit writing assignment #2 involving a topic from Berg Chapters 5 and 6 and/or Barry Chapters 1 through 7. Topics to be assigned at the February 1 class.

March 15 and 22. New York City in the federal system. Read and be prepared to discuss chapters 3 and 4 in Berg, ***New York City Politics: Governing Gotham***.

March 29 and April 5. Charter Revision and Governmental Reform. Read and be prepared to discuss chapter 7 in Berg, ***New York City Politics: Governing Gotham***. Read and be prepared to discuss chapters 8 through 16 in Barry, ***The Scandal of Reform***. By April 9, submit writing assignment #3 involving a topic from Berg Chapter 7 and/or Barry Chapters 8 through 16. Topics to be assigned at the March 1 class.

April 12. The City Council and Representative Government in New York City. Read and be prepared to discuss chapter 8 in Berg, ***New York City Politics: Governing Gotham***.

April 26 and May 3. Delivering services in New York City, including efforts at decentralization and community participation. Read and be prepared to discuss chapter 8 in Berg, ***New York City Politics: Governing Gotham***. By May 10, submit writing assignment #4 involving one or another of the efforts at decentralization. Topics to be assigned at the April 5 class.

May 11. Final Exam