

Political Science 17.20

Introduction to American Politics

Professor Devin Caughey

MIT Department of Political Science

Lecture 1: Course Introduction
February 5, 2013

Today's Agenda

- 1 Introductions
- 2 Overview of course and syllabus
- 3 Reading quiz
- 4 Recitation times
- 5 Writing self-assessment

Introductions

Professor: Devin Caughey (pronounced “ko-ee”)

- **Research interests:** US political development, Southern politics, Congress, public opinion, statistical methods

Learning Goals

By the end of this course, **students will be able to:**

- Describe the essential features of **American politics and government**.
- Understand key **conceptual and analytic frameworks** of political science.
- **Apply these theoretical frameworks** to specific aspects of American politics.
- **Communicate** their analyses to others via oral and written compositions appropriate to political science.

Expectations

- Treat each other with courtesy and respect.
- Put away laptops and other electronic devices.
- Act with academic integrity.

Assessment

This is a **communication-intensive** course, so reading and writing will be particularly emphasized. Grades are based on five components:

- 1 Daily reading quizzes (15%)
- 2 Oral presentation (10%)
- 3 Long paper (15% draft, 20% final)
- 4 Three short papers (10% each)
- 5 Recitation participation (10%)

Reading and Writing

Readings:

- Books to purchase:
 - *Principles and Practice of American Politics*, 4th edition
 - Dahl, *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?*
 - Mayhew, *Partisan Balance*
- Articles, mostly scholarly

Writing:

- 3 short papers to prepare for final paper (revision required)
- Must meet with writing advisor at least once (do it early)

Overview of Semester

- Part I: **Foundations** (analytical, cultural, and constitutional)
- Part II: **Institutions** (federalism, branches of government, etc.)
- Part III: **Mass Behavior** (how ordinary citizens think about and participate in politics)
- Part IV: **American Politics as a System** (how it all fits together)
- Part V: **Substantive Debates** (five areas of American politics where political science intersects with normative debates)

Key Dates

- February 26: Short paper #1
- March 19: Short paper #2
- April 9: Short paper #3
- April 18: Tentative idea for long paper topic
- April 30: Draft of long paper
- May 16: Revised and final version of long paper

Next Class

Readings (to be quizzed!):

- Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*
 - Make sure you understand each “dimension” of power
- Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Kernell & Smith)
- Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons” (Kernell & Smith)
- Ostrom et al., “Revisiting the Commons”
 - Olson, Hardin, and Ostrom are all concerned with collective action problems and how to solve them.
- Putnam, “The Prosperous Community” (Kernell & Smith)
- Pierson, “Increasing Returns”
 - How institutions persist, develop, and shape behavior; note connections with other readings; work through carefully.

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