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
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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