

INTRODUCTION AND GETTING STARTED

A standard career guide is a place where you simply learn how to apply for jobs. This is not that type of book. Consider this more of a guide to your story: who you are and what problems you hope to solve in this world. Here you will start to tell the story of your interests, passions, and aspirations. This story—one that is continuously changing and evolving—is the key to success once you complete your degree. This guide will help you think about how you fill in the details of the emerging story of who you are and where you are headed. It will help you navigate the next few years of your college experience and provide a path for the life and world beyond.

Chapter Objectives

- Introduce the concept of telling the story
- Discuss why this text focuses on the job market within American politics and the universe of career options that exist
- Learn what to do with one's interests and how to leverage such interests and academic work for employment after college
- Develop those first few steps toward professional readiness after graduation

You chose this course in American politics for any number of reasons.

Perhaps you're interested in American national elections and political parties. Maybe you've been moved by a social movement or how institutions of government respond—or don't respond—to natural disasters. You might take in current events voraciously and want to match that interest with an academic subject. Perhaps you wonder why the policy preferences of your friends and colleagues don't seem to find an appropriate outlet in your state legislature or Congress. Or you notice every

year how local elections in your city or town seem to draw the interests of relatively few people.

It could be that you enter this course with plenty of questions: How do American political institutions work? How does the United States economy impact its politics? How can nongovernmental agencies in the United States impact poverty, illness, or social injustice? Or, why didn't my candidate win the last election in my state?

These are just a few questions or concerns that you might have considered before taking an introductory course in American politics. For some of you, these issues and your interests will grow, and you'll major in political science and, if you can, concentrate in American government or politics. For many others, you'll major in something else because of other interests, but you find this course or this area to be fascinating. Perhaps you'll minor or take a few more classes as electives. Regardless of what you choose, there's another question you might have considered: What am I going to do with my passion for American politics?

This book will help you answer this question and will help match your interest in politics with postgraduate outcomes.

So, what does the future hold for a student in American politics? Well, to begin with, there are more opportunities than you might even be aware of right now. If this area is a passion of yours, how can you make a career out of it?

The answers are here. There are many rewarding, and varied, career options and postgraduate opportunities that await you at the completion of your degree. This book will guide you through the remainder of your undergraduate work and offer tips for navigating your life and the world beyond.

Your success beyond your undergraduate years begins with you and the story about yourself you will be able to tell. Do not get bogged down with the question, "What am I going to be?" Rather, spend some time following the advice of Google's Education Evangelist, Jaime Casap, and ask the question, "What problem do I want to solve?"

When you redirect yourself away from a narrow focus ("I want to be a lawyer.") to a broader focus on a problem or set of problems ("I want to reduce inequality in America."), then you open a broader range of possibilities for the outcomes you'll encounter when you're done with college. It is also reasonable to believe that you will become a lawyer! But a broader focus on your studies will make you better prepared for your future career path even if you come full circle.

Focusing on a problem or set of problems you wish to solve also makes sense given the job market you will enter when college is over. Today's job market is continually churning with rapid advances in technology changing the basic contours of our economy. Somewhere in your family history is a story of a person who worked for one company or one entity his or her entire life and retired, perhaps with a pension.

That world no longer exists. Your world will be one of many jobs and multiple career paths. A rigorous and robust college education is the critical first step to navigating an ever-changing job market. This guide exists, in part, to help you find the right path. One key to successfully doing so starts in this course in American politics.

TELLING YOUR STORY.

“The question used to be ‘What do you want to be when you grow up?’ Now it should be ‘What problem do you want to solve?’”

—Jaime Casap

The first step to a successful outcome is knowing who you are. Follow Casap’s advice above and think about the types of problems in American politics you hope to solve.

Take a moment here to jot then down. Don’t hold back! Worried about low voter turnout? Concerned about money in politics? Think taxes are too high and regulations too burdensome? Jot it all down.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO STUDY AMERICAN POLITICS?

American politics is a broad term, meant here to encompass the study of institutions (Congress, the presidency, political parties); political behavior (voting and elections, social movements); public policy and administration; and constitutional law. These studies are related, and your college or university very likely offers specific courses in one or all of these areas. The study of American politics and government is typically one element of a well-rounded major in political science.

A student of politics will have an opportunity to engage all the other subfields of the discipline: international relations, comparative politics, and political theory. What distinguishes a student pursuing American politics is a passion for the study

HELPFUL LINKS

Want to learn more about political science and the study of American politics? Check out these organizations:

American Political Science Association (www.apsanet.org)

Pi Sigma Alpha, the national political science honor society (<http://office2248.wixsite.com/pi-sigma-alpha>)

Political Studies Association American Politics Group (www.american-politics-group-uk.net)

The Roosevelt Institute (<http://rooseveltinstitute.org>)

of political life in the United States. And if you recognize this interest in yourself, then well done! You've accomplished the primary task in this book's objective to get you to tell your story: understanding your interests and passions.

So, you've established that you have an interest in American politics and government. Let's demonstrate how this can be used from the very beginning with the most basic element in launching a career: the resume. Although the job market has changed dramatically and will continue to do so during your time in college, there is one constant in the process of getting a job, and that's a well-developed resume. Consider that workers from Generation X (born between 1965 and 1984) changed jobs about twice during their first 10 years out of college. Millennials changed jobs four times or more during the same time frame. There are jobs and career options today that did not exist just a decade ago, such as social media managers, sustainability coordinators, or app developers.

The job market will continue to churn during your time in college. This guide will help you prepare for that.

Remarkably, many undergraduates wait until they need to apply for something vital before they think about putting together a resume. You should consider your resume to be a work in progress and, as such, let's get to work!

DEVELOPING YOUR RESUME

It begins with the easy stuff: name, address, education, and interests. We'll revisit the resume in the succeeding chapters and fill it in as we go:

Casey E. Student

20 Main Street

Springfield, IL 03636

Phone number

Email

Education

B.A. in *(Fill in the name of your actual major)*, expected 2022

GPA: 3.2 (overall), 3.6 (major) *(You should be able to get this information from your school's degree audit or your academic advisor.)*

Objective: To begin my career in American politics by *(Write down the problem you want to solve. Write down more than one!)*

Okay, we've established your interests, and you've given some thought to the problems you want to solve. Know that it is okay at this point for your interests to be broad. In fact, think broadly. Perhaps you want to end inequality in America, improve public education, help craft a regulatory environment that allows small businesses to thrive, upgrade American infrastructure, or protect migrants from mistreatment. These are all broad and admirable goals, and the people currently invested in trying to solve these problems need people like you who are thinking along these lines.

As you move through your curriculum, co-curriculum, internships, and the first steps in your postgraduate life, you will learn how to tailor your broad interests (which you should never lose!) into actual career objectives.

The B.A. in Politics

Graduates with a degree in politics have opportunities across many fields: law, education, nonprofit and corporate work, service, and government service. Consider the following list of individuals who studied global politics and note the range of career outcomes:

ANSWERING YOUR QUESTIONS

What can you do with a B.A. in political science? Check out the many varied career paths of those who followed your academic interests in college.

Lloyd Blankfein, Goldman Sachs CEO

Anderson Cooper, CNN journalist

Mia Hamm-Garciaparra, professional soccer player, and Olympic medalist

Larry Hogan, governor of Maryland

Barack Obama, former president of the United States

Janet Napolitano, president, University of California

Condoleezza Rice, former Secretary of State and academic leader

Anne Rice, author

Career Outcomes in American Politics

There are many more outcomes for students interested in American politics and government. Remember that your future will be highly mobile. “Job hopping”—moving from one job to another in a relatively short time frame, say moving on or moving up every 2 years—is increasingly common among younger

workers. Not only will you move around, but you expect to move around. Sometimes this movement will be within a defined career path, say marketing.

For example, a young worker interested in social media might begin a career as an intern for a local nonprofit that wants to strengthen its social media presence. This could lead to an entry-level position as a communications coordinator, which might lead to a copywriter position, then an editorial position, then a social media strategist position for a large multinational corporation.

But it is also just as plausible that this young person interested in social media could find her way into multimedia design or sales, or become a technical writer who then becomes an operations analyst. That person might start in the corporate world but end up doing social media outreach for a nongovernmental organization focused on immigration.

Yes, there are traditional and excellent outcomes for students in American politics—law, advocacy, research and writing, staff positions on Capitol Hill or in your state capital, public administration—and your major choice will make these paths more likely.

Beyond these examples, it is important to remember that some of the jobs and opportunities that you might pursue in answering your question (What problem do I want to solve?) may not even exist today or are part of a field that is rather small but growing. Data analytics, for example, continues to grow as an employment field with a lot of opportunities. And there are other paths that might seem far-fetched to you today as a student of American politics—careers in management, data analysis, IT networking, marketing, or sales. But these are also good possibilities.

CONCLUSION

The following chapters will help you navigate your curriculum and co-curriculum with an eye on translating your experiences into successful outcomes when you're finished with college.

It goes without saying that the success of this advice is predicated on you successfully pursuing your coursework. Naturally, if you've chosen political science and American politics as your major or minor because that is where your interests lie, you are more likely to demonstrate strength and success in those courses. This book will also help you translate your interests, and the skills you are developing in your classes, into language that employers want to see on resumes and in cover letters. It will also introduce you to a few alumni in the field who are successfully navigating life after college. Finally, it will give you a series of Action Items to pursue to help you think about essential items on your agenda over the next few years.

ACTION ITEM

Social Media

Over 88% of millennials use one or more social media platforms. There are many reasons why, but consistently, the most important one is to see what your friends are talking about online.

Social media is a powerful and persistent part of your life. But as you move toward your first career or competitive postgraduate outcome, it is important to remember that the social media can provide you with an expanded network beyond your close friends and associates for learning. It can also be used by others seeking to find more about you. As an action item, let's think about our social media use.

1. Which platforms do you use on social media?
2. If a prospective employer looked at your social media postings right now, what is the first thing they'd see?

Things to consider: Do you use some social media just for friends and others to gather information/learn new things? If so, which social media platforms? Have you started a professional profile on LinkedIn? If not, the resume that you will be developing in later chapters can be easily used on that platform. If you have, you can update your LinkedIn profile in tandem with the resume you're working on there!