PROSEMINAR IN PUBLIC LAW (PSCI 5220.002)
COURSE SYLLABUS
SPRING 2009
WEDNESDAY: 2:00-4:50

Instructor: Professor Collins
Office: Wooten Hall 133
Office Hours: 12:00-1:30 Mondays and Wednesdays and by appointment
E-mail: pmcollins@unt.edu
Webpage: http://www.psci.unt.edu/~pmcollins
Phone: 940.369.8892
Location: Wooten Hall 130

OBJECTIVE

The discipline of political science finds its origins in the study of law and legal doctrine. While the discipline has become much more diverse in terms of the topics investigated by political scientists, it is nonetheless essential to understand the roles played by the courts in the political process. The purpose of this seminar is to introduce graduate students to the complexities of judicial politics and behavior by focusing on empirical research on law and courts. To achieve this end, we will focus on a wide range of theoretically rich and empirically driven research, including examining decision making by judges, the litigation strategies of interest groups, staffing the bench, as well as how courts both shape and are shaped by public opinion.

READINGS

Please purchase the following books:


In addition to these books, the bulk of our reading will consist of scholarly articles and book chapters. Journal articles can be found online (www.jstor.org or www.lexisnexis.com) and in the journal stacks in the library. In addition, I will also have copies of some of the less accessible articles and chapters on CD, available on my office door, for students to borrow for one hour periods.

**Grades**

Final grades will be computed on the following basis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Review Essays</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participation**

Students are expected to come to all classes well prepared, having done the readings for each seminar. I suggest preparing notes on the readings we are discussing as a guide for class discussion. Failure to attend class will negatively influence your participation grade. As this is a seminar class, a substantial proportion of the grade is based on participation in in-class discussions. In addition, the participation grade will be based in part on serving as a discussion leader. Students will rotate responsibility for leading class discussions, with each student serving as a discussion leader at least twice throughout the semester. As a discussion leader, students will facilitate discussion by providing a list of 10 discussion questions, which we will focus on in class. These discussion questions will be emailed to each member of the class and the professor no later than 5:00 PM on the Monday before class. Note that students will have some control over the topics for which they are responsible.

**Critical Review Essays**

Students are required to write three critical review papers (5-8 pages) on any of the sets of readings required in the course, plus at least one recommended reading. These papers will NOT be summaries of the readings, but instead should be thoughtful critiques of the readings, with attention paid to the development of theory, the relevance of theory vis-à-vis the hypotheses, measurement issues, the appropriateness of the data employed, and the like. In crafting your critical review essays, you are to (rightly) assume that I have already read the material you are critiquing. Critical review essays are due 24 hours in advance of the class at which the relevant readings are to be discussed (i.e., by 2:00 on the Tuesday before the topic will be discussed). Students are free to select any of the sets of readings as the focus of their papers with the following limitations: at least one review must be completed by the last seminar meeting in February and only one review can be submitted on either April 22nd or April 29th.

**Research Paper**

Students will write an empirical research paper on a judicial politics topic of their choice. The paper should be about 15-25 pages long and should be structured similarly to the journal articles we will read throughout the semester. As student’s experience with methodologies will vary, the level of sophistication of the statistical analysis expected will match to student skill levels. I strongly encourage you to select a topic that will serve as a foundation for a future publication.
Students should see the professor to discuss possible topics during the first month of the semester. A brief proposal (about one page) of the paper topic is due in class on February 18th. References will follow the citation style of the American Political Science Association.

During the final class period(s), students will present their work in front of the class. The purpose of doing so is to familiarize students with presenting work at academic conferences. Students will be given 10 minutes to present their research, which will be followed by a 5 minute question and answer section with the audience. In addition, each student will serve as a discussant (reviewer) of another student’s paper. The discussant will provide a one page (single spaced) memo critiquing the paper they are reviewing. This memo will be distributed to the paper author and the professor on May 6th. Failure to draft and distribute a review will negatively affect a student’s participation grade. To give the discussants enough time to read and comment on the papers, research papers are due in class on April 29th.

**SCHEDULE**

**JANUARY 21: WELCOME AND GENERAL CLASS INFORMATION**

**JANUARY 28: JUDICIAL POLITICS AND BEHAVIOR AS A SUBFIELD OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**Required Readings:**


Recommended Readings:


**FEBRUARY 4: STAFFING THE FEDERAL BENCH**

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


**FEBRUARY 11: SETTING THE SUPREME COURT’S AGENDA**

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**FEBRUARY 18: THE ATTITUINAL MODEL**

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


6


**FEBRUARY 25: THE LEGAL MODEL**

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**MARCH 4: STRATEGIC ACCOUNTS OF JUDICIAL DECISION MAKING**

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**MARCH 11: ADDITIONAL RESEARCH ON SUPREME COURT DECISION MAKING**


**Recommended Readings:**


**MARCH 25: DECISION MAKING ON THE LOWER FEDERAL COURTS**

**Required Readings:**


Recommended Readings:


**APRIL 1: STATE COURTS: SELECTION AND DECISION MAKING**

Required Readings:


**Recommended Readings:**


APRIL 8: JUDICIAL POLITICS FROM A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**APRIL 15: OUTSIDE ACTORS IN THE COURTS**

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**APRIL 22: PUBLIC OPINION AND THE COURTS**

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**APRIL 29: THE IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF COURT DECISIONS**

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


MAY 6: IN CLASS PRESENTATIONS

MAY 13: IN CLASS PRESENTATIONS (IF NECESSARY)

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

Academic Honesty: Absolutely no form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated in this class. Incidents of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the course (0.0) and appropriate steps to remove that person from the program will be taken.

The UNT Department of Political Science Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism: The UNT Code of Student Conduct and Discipline defines cheating and plagiarism as the use of unauthorized books, notes, or otherwise securing help in a test; copying others’ tests, assignments, reports, or term papers; representing the work of another as one’s own; collaborating without authority with another student during an examination or in preparing academic work; or otherwise practicing scholastic dishonesty.

Normally, the minimum penalty for cheating or plagiarism is a grade of “F” in the course. In the case of graduate departmental exams, the minimum penalty shall be failure of all fields of the exam. Determination of cheating or plagiarism shall be made by the instructor in the course, or by the field faculty in the case of departmental exams.

Cases of cheating or plagiarism on graduate departmental exams, theses, or dissertations shall automatically be referred to the departmental Graduate Studies Committee. Cases of cheating or plagiarism in ordinary coursework may, at the discretion of the instructor, be referred to the Undergraduate Studies Committee in the case of undergraduate students, or the Graduate Studies Committee in the case of graduate students. These committees, acting as agents of the department Chair, shall impose further penalties, or recommend further penalties to the Dean of Students, if they determine that the case warrants it. In all cases, the Dean of Students shall be informed in writing of the case.

Students may appeal any decision under this policy by following the procedures laid down in the UNT Code of Student Conduct and Discipline.

Office Hours: Office hours are currently scheduled from 12:00-1:30 Mondays and Wednesdays. If these times prove to be inconvenient, special appointments are available. Students should contact me to schedule special appointments. Contact via e-mail is encouraged.

Accommodations: If you are a student with a disability and wish to request accommodations, please notify me by the second week of class. You are also encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Accommodation at (940) 565-4323. The ODA makes formal recommendations regarding necessary and appropriate accommodations based on specifically diagnosed disabilities. Information regarding disabilities is treated in a confidential manner.

Statement of ADA Compliance: The Political Science Department cooperates with the Office of Disability Accommodation to make reasonable accommodations for qualified students with
disabilities. Please present your written accommodation request on or before the sixth class day (beginning of the second week of classes).

**Religious Holidays:** In accordance with University policy, I will excuse any absences that result from religious observances, provided that you notify me in advanced of your planned absence.

**Stipulation:** I reserve the right to change this syllabus as I see fit at any point in the semester.