POLS 4023
Judicial Politics
Fall 2014

Professor: Dr. Matthew P. Hitt
Classroom: 0116 Stubbs Hall
Class Time: 3:00 – 4:20 p.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays
Office: 233 Stubbs Hall
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E-mail: mhitt2@lsu.edu
Office Hours: 1-3 Fridays, and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will introduce students to the judicial process within the American governmental system. Additionally, this course serves as an introduction to political science scholarship on law and courts. Students will study the organization of courts, the individuals involved in the judicial arena, and the structure of the legal system, including trial and appellate courts. The course will focus on the relationship of politics to the behavior of judges, and to the structure and functioning of courts.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Students will learn most importantly that judges are political actors and that courts are policy-making bodies. Students will gain an understanding about the structures and processes of court systems. Students will be able to critically evaluate the American judicial system and will demonstrate analytical skills through both written and spoken communication exercises.

TEXTBOOK:


COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Students are required to read the assignments, be prepared for discussion, attend class on time and for the duration of the class and participate in class discussions. Three examinations will be given. The exams will be a combination of multiple choice and short answer. The exams will not be cumulative. Makeup examinations will be only for university excused absences or for those absences necessitated by a legitimate and documented illness. Students must adhere to the Code of Student Conduct.

ASSIGNMENTS:

There are three required writing assignments in this class. All papers are to be double-spaced, in 12 point Times New Roman font, with 1 inch margins. Over the course of the term, students will be required to complete three 3-5 page response papers to an article assigned in the class, uploaded in PDF format to Moodle by 11:55 p.m. on the due date. These response papers should summarize the chosen article’s motivating question, the theory motivating the hypotheses, the hypotheses themselves, the data, the
method of analysis, and the conclusions of the authors. These response papers should also make reference to any unanswered questions suggested by the research that you yourself might develop into a research paper of your own.

These papers should spend no more than about a page summarizing the article. The bulk of your response should be thinking critically about what unanswered questions are implied by the findings, along with the limitations of the research itself. It is not enough to simply toss out a criticism or question; explain why you presented that question/critique, and what you would expect to see if the authors took your point into account.

If Moodle crashes or fails to upload your paper, it is your responsibility to immediately email me (mhitt2@lsu.edu) with your paper attached before the cutoff time of 11:55 p.m. to receive full credit.

Papers are worth 50 points each. Papers earning 45-50 points (A) will meet all requirements, display sufficient mastery of the literature being discussed, high-quality writing and argumentation, and address thoughtfully and logically the limitations and possible future research questions implied by the work. Papers earning 40-44 points (B) will meet all minimum requirements, but contain errors in writing or interpretation of the literature discussed, but still discuss thoughtfully the limitations and possible future research questions implied by the work. Papers earning 35-39 points (C) may fail to meet the minimum requirements in one or more ways, but still demonstrate a meaningful effort to complete the assignment. These papers will still present criticisms or suggestions for future work, but these ideas will not be fully developed, or may not connect as well logically to the rest of the analysis. Papers earning 30-34 points (D) will fail to meet the minimum requirements in one or more ways, display enough errors in writing and argument to be distracting, but still represent a meaningful effort towards completing the assignment.

Late papers will be penalized 10 points for each 24-hour (or less) period beyond the deadline. Each paper is worth 50 points. The three exams are worth 75 points. Finally, there will be five one-question exams, given on randomly selected days at the end of class. Each of these exams is worth 5 points. Grades are based on the following scale:

360-400=A
320-359=B
280-319=C
240-279=D
Below 239=F

EXTRA CREDIT POLICY:

I do not offer extra credit. Because not all students feel comfortable asking for extra credit, giving extra credit to some students and not others leads to inequalities in grades unrelated to merit. Further, allowing an extra credit assignment that some students with jobs or families may not have time to complete also disadvantages some students, again leading to grade inequalities unrelated to merit.
ACADEMIC HONESTY:

I expect all of the work you do in this course to be your own. No dishonest practices on the examinations or assignments or in the course will be acceptable, and any suspected cases of dishonesty will be reported to the university committee on academic misconduct and handled according to university policy. The quizzes and exams are to be taken during the allotted time period without the aid of books, notes, or other students. All assignments are to be completed independently.

STUDENT SUPPORT AND SUCCESS:

I want every student in this class to succeed. My goal as your instructor is to put every student in a position to master the material and earn an excellent grade in this course. To that end, it is my aim to be as accessible as possible. Please do not hesitate to visit my office hours, or schedule an appointment to see me, if you have any questions, concerns, or difficulties regarding the course.

Further, there are excellent resources on this campus to help you succeed academically and personally. The Center for Academic Success (http://cas.lsu.edu) can provide academic guidance and tutoring. The LSU writing center in 151 Coates Hall (http://sites01.lsu.edu/wp/cxc/writing/) can aid you with the written assignments in this class. The University Career Center (http://students.lsu.edu/careercenter) can aid you with job and post-graduation questions. Finally, LSU CARES (http://studentlife.lsu.edu/lsu-cares) provides support for physical and mental health, and is a great resource for issues of anxiety and depression. These resources exist only to help you succeed at LSU and you should feel welcome to take advantage of them.

DISABILITY:

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact me to arrange an appointment as soon as possible. At the appointment we can discuss the course format, anticipate your needs, and explore potential accommodations. I rely on the Office for Disability Services for assistance in verifying the need for accommodations and developing accommodation strategies. If you have not previously contacted the Office for Disability Services, I encourage you to do so.

TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE:

January 20-22: Introduction/Overview
   Required: http://svmiller.com/blog/2014/08/reading-a-regression-table-a-guide-for-students/
   Recommended: Baum, American Courts, Preface and Chapter 1

January 27-29: Court Organization
   Recommended: Baum, American Courts, Chapter 2
February 3-5: Lawyers

   Recommended: Baum, American Courts, Chapter 3;

February 5: **Paper #1 due**

February 10: Selection of Judges (Lower Federal and State Courts)

   Recommended: Baum, American Courts, Chapter 4

February 12: **Exam #1**

February 17-19: NO CLASS (Laissez Les Bon Temps Rouler)

February 24-26: Judges

   Recommended: Baum, American Courts, Chapter 5

March 3-5: Criminal Trial Courts


   Recommended: Baum, American Courts, Chapter 6

March 10-12: Civil Trial Courts

   Recommended: Baum, American Courts, Chapter 7

March 12: **Paper #2 Due**
March 17: Appellate Courts


Recommended: Baum, American Courts, Chapter 8

March 19: Exam #2

March 24-26: Supreme Court Appointments


March 31-April 2: Supreme Court Case Selection


April 7-10: NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

April 14: Supreme Court Decision Making


April 16: NO CLASS (Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting)

April 21-23: External Influences on Supreme Court Decision Making


April 28-30: The Impact of the Supreme Court


April 30: **Paper #3 due**

Wednesday, May 6: **Final Exam** – 12:30 PM