Course Summary and Objectives:

As the name implies, this is a course about the justice system in the U.S. While you should have some foundational knowledge of the business of the courts from PSCI 2306 (1040), I do not assume you know much. We will begin the class with a look at the nature and scope of court authority (what is a case? what is the difference between civil and criminal law? what is a tort? what is jurisdiction?). We will turn fairly quickly to a more in-depth consideration of how the courts operate to resolve both civil and criminal disputes. As we move through the process, you will work in teams to

- examine the flow of the judicial process;
- apply your understanding of the judicial process to simulations and problems; and
- explore the pitfalls in our justice system and potential reforms.

I expect students to engage in the course material in a direct and meaningful way. You will need to attend court to observe the justice system in action; you will need to attend class regularly; and you will need to engage in team-based learning during class meetings, actually talking to your classmates and participating in decision-making. If you are not prepared to participate, this is not the class for you.

By the end of the semester, a student who has engaged fully in the class will be able to

- identify and classify disputes capable of judicial resolution;
- explain the process by which the judicial branch processes those disputes (from initiation through final appeal);
- analyze the sources of and solutions to some of the common failures in the American court system.

Required Course Materials:


All other required readings are available online. Our course has migrated to UNT’s new learning management system, Canvas (instead of Blackboard). You can find it at unt.instructure.com. If you forget the url, don’t worry: just log into Blackboard, find our “course,” and follow the link inside our otherwise-empty shell.
Grading:

Your grade will be based on the following components:

- TBL: 50%
- Court Observation Paper: 25%
- Four Short Essays: 25%

Grades will be based on the usual scale (90%+ = A, 80%+ = B, 70%+ = C, 60%+ = D, below 60% = F). I use standard mathematical rounding, but will not otherwise manipulate grades. There is no extra credit in this class (there may be opportunities to earn additional tokens, but they will be made available to the whole class – no special dispensations).

On the first day of class, the class will collectively determine how to divide the 50% of the course grade for the team-based learning (between IRAT, TRAT, and peer-review). I will provide several options and you will have the ability to vote.

Team-Based Learning:

Overview:

This course uses a team-based learning approach that emphasizes your ability to apply course concepts, solve problems, and engage in meaningful simulations. Course requirements are specifically designed to ensure that individuals are prepared for team work and minimize the likelihood of typical “group work” problems (individuals shirking their responsibilities, other individuals dominating the group, or the division of labor to avoid group interaction). All team work is done during class time. Course grades will be based on work from both individuals and teams.

You will be assigned to a 5- to 6-person team during the first week of class. Every unit of the course will follow a general rhythm:

Day 1: You will take a RAT (Readiness Assurance Test) as in individual (IRAT) and then again as a team (TRAT). It is thus imperative that you come to class prepared by doing all assigned reading.

Following days: We will explore the unit topic in more depth through short lectures, discussions, and team “application exercises.” What are application exercises? Working in teams, you will use your understanding of class material to solve specific problems. As a team, you will need to come to a consensus on your solution; you will report this solution to the class and defend it as a team. These problems will serve as a basis for class discussion when time permits.

Individual Readiness Assurance Tests (IRATs): Individual RATs are 10 question multiple choice quizzes. For each question, you have three points. If you are confident that you know the answer, you can put all three points on a single answer (so you get 3
points if you are correct, but zero points if you are wrong). In the alternative, you can split your “bet” on two or three possible answers . . . but if you place a “1” on answer “A” and A is correct, you only get one point.

**Team RATs (TRATs):** After you take the individual RAT, you will work with your team to discuss the questions and options and reach a consensus about the answer. Once your group agrees, you scratch off the corresponding response (on a card that looks a bit like a lottery ticket). If you see a star, you got it right and your team gets four points for the question. If you are wrong, try another … if you get it right the second time, you get two points. Your third try will yield one point.

**Appeals:** If your team believes that I have gotten an answer wrong or that a question is worded in such a way that a reasonable person might have difficulty determining the correct answer, you may file an appeal. An appeal must be written on a form I will provide; it must provide a clear argument for your position; and it must provide (where appropriate) references to the reading material. If your team makes a persuasive case, I will award your team members the full points on both the TRAT and the IRAT for that question. One group’s appeal, however, does not apply to other groups.

**Peer Evaluation:** At the midterm and again at the end of the semester, you will evaluate the members of your team. You should evaluate both their effort and their helpfulness; the rubric is available on Canvas. A student who tries to participate regularly but is usually off-track should receive a good score but not a perfect score. A student who rarely contributes but whose rare contributions are valuable should receive an average score, but certainly not a perfect score. You will evaluate each team member on a scale of 0 – 10.

**Court Observation Paper:** During the course of the semester, you will be expected to observe court proceedings. You may do this here in Denton, in Dallas, in Fort Worth, or in your home community (if you wish to attend court during spring break). You are free to attend sessions in multiple courts. You must observe for a total of 10 hours spaced over at least three days. You will prepare a written report on your experiences. That report should be between 2500 - 3000 words long. First, you will have a 1000 – 1500 word summary of your observations (what did you see, which court were you in, what date/time were you there – think of this as an INTERESTING diary). Then, you will write a 1500 – 2000 word reflection on your observation that connects to course material. You should cite sources where appropriate (any systematic citation format is fine). Your observation paper will be evaluated on the basis of clarity, organization, mechanics, and your ability to tie your observations to class material. Keep in mind: the title of this assignment is “observation” and you have to observe to complete it, but your paper should be thoughtful and analytical in nature. Do not simply chat about your feelings.

**Short Essays:** Over the course of the semester there will be four short essays, each addressing a question based on course content. You must write three of these essays; it is up to you to decide which three to write. These essays must be one to two pages in length. In fact, you are
LIMITED to two pages. This is an exercise in concision. Despite their length, your papers must make a compelling and well-reasoned argument.

Absences:

You are expected to attend every class. As a result, you don’t get “credit” for attending by having attendance part of your grade. However, failing to attend will cause your grade to be reduced.

*If you have an absence due to a university-sponsored event, are observing a religious holiday, are engaged in active military service, or are parenting pursuant to Title IX*, you will get credit for attending that day so long as you give me written notice of the absence at least 48 hours in advance or (in the case of parenting) within 48 hours after. If the day you miss is a RAT day, you will have one week from the date of the absence to make up the IRAT in 125 Wooten Hall. You will receive the Team RAT score earned by the rest of your team.

*If you have an absence for any other reason including illness or family emergency*, you can use a token (see below for more information) to have the absence treated as a university-excused absence.

If you are out of tokens, you will simply receive a “0” for the IRAT (you’ll still receive the team RAT score earned by your team). Moreover, you will have an unexcused absence. Each unexcused absence drops 3 percentage points from your final grade.

Please note: Just as with a real job, your absences will affect your colleagues. Your team may penalize you for missing class when they do your peer evaluation. If you want to stay in their good graces, you should communicate with them in a timely and effective manner. You do not need to disclose personal medical information to each other (“I’m sick” or “I have a personal emergency” will suffice). Don’t just tell me … tell your team.

Tokens:

In order to account for illness and unexpected events, you will have 5 “tokens” to spend during the semester. You can spend tokens on the following:

- 1 token for missing a class for anything other than a University-excused absence
- 2 tokens to turn in a writing assignment up to 1 week late

To redeem a token, you will fill out a token redemption form. I will have the forms with me in class every day. In the alternative, you can pick up a form from the rack outside my office door, fill it out, and submit it with your make-up IRAT or leave it in my mailbox in 125 Wooten Hall.
**Important Policies:**

*Respect for Race, Religion, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation*

My class should be a safe place for all students, regardless of race, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation. If I (or a classmate) do or say something that makes you feel disrespected or fearful, please speak up. I will not retaliate. Furthermore, if I use inappropriate pronouns when speaking to you, please let me know. I am striving to use less gendered speech, but it is a struggle for me. At a minimum, I would like to use the pronouns with which you are most comfortable.

*ADA Statement*

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one’s specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu

*Academic Integrity Standards and Sanctions for Violations*

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. I impose a grade of “0” for the specific assignment and, per university policy, report the issue to the Office of Academic Integrity.

*Acceptable Student Behavior*

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor’s ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct.

*Emergency Notification and Procedures*

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety
emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Blackboard for contingency plans for covering course materials.

**Retention or Student Records**

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about students’ records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University’s policy.

**Student Perceptions of Teaching Effectiveness (SPOT)**

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during weeks 13 and 14 of the long semesters to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the spot website at [www.spot.unt.edu](http://www.spot.unt.edu) or email [spot@unt.edu](mailto:spot@unt.edu).
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<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Read</th>
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<td>Welcome and Introduction</td>
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<td>Analogical Reasoning</td>
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<td>Allocation of TBL points</td>
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<td>1/30 – 2/13</td>
<td>Unit 1: Legal Actors</td>
<td>Kritzer, “Contingency Fee Lawyers as Gatekeepers”</td>
<td>1. Lecture Day</td>
<td>Short Essay 1</td>
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<td>PBS, “Justice for Sale”</td>
<td>2. RAT day</td>
<td>Due 2/20</td>
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<td>3. Team App on Legal Ethics</td>
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<td>4. Team App on Contingency Fee Lawyers</td>
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<td>5. Team App on Choosing Judges</td>
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<td>2/15 – 3/8</td>
<td>Unit 2: Civil Law</td>
<td>Sarat, “Grievances, Claims, and Disputes”</td>
<td>1. Lecture Day</td>
<td>Complete Peer Review 1</td>
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<td>Gaeta and Sitnick, &quot;Reliability and Admissibility&quot;</td>
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<td>Kelsey, “Virginia’s Answer to Daubert’s Question”</td>
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<td>ABA opposition to tort reform</td>
<td>5. Team App on Tort Reform</td>
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<td>ABF on tort reform</td>
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<td>Weekley, “Tort Reform is Good for Texas”</td>
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<td>Case Study</td>
<td>Bingham Book</td>
<td>“Pair and Share” Discussion Questions</td>
<td>Short Essay 3 Due 3/29</td>
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2. RAT day  
3. Team App on Prosecutorial Discretion  
4. Team App on Criminal Defense  
5. Team App on Indigent Defense | Short Essay 4 Due 4/17 |
2. RAT day  
3. Team App on Agenda Setting  
4. Team App on Cameras in the Courtroom  
5. Team App on Constitutional Interpretation | Court Observation Paper Due (4/26) |
| 5/1-5/3    | Course Summary       |                                                                      |                                                                            | Complete Peer Review 2 by 5/1            |