Course Overview

The United States Supreme Court plays an important role in American democracy. As the highest court in the federal judiciary, its decisions do more than resolve disputes between litigants; they announce important public policies that govern relationships among citizens and governments. The Supreme Court plays an important role in determining and the scope of freedoms enjoyed in the United States and its decisions frequently alter the balance of power between political actors and institutions, including citizens, the president, Congress, the states, and the Court itself.

In this course, we will explore the Supreme Court as a political and policymaking institution. We will consider the processes by which cases are decided and the factors that influence Supreme Court justices’ decisions. We will also consider the relationships between the Supreme Court and other actors, including the elected branches of government, interest groups, and the public.

The judicial power of the United States shall be vested in one supreme court, and in such inferior courts as the congress may from time to time ordain and establish.
### What You’ll Do in PSCI 3210

#### 1. Team-Based Learning & Readiness Assurance Tests (RATS)

This course uses a team-based learning approach that emphasizes your ability to apply course concepts and to solve problems. Course requirements are designed to ensure that individuals are prepared for team work and minimize the likelihood of typical “group work” problems (individuals shirking their responsibilities, individuals dominating the group, or the division of labor to avoid group interaction).

Course grades will be based on work from individuals and teams. You will be assigned to a team during the first day of class.

At the beginning of each course unit, you will take an individual Readiness Assurance Test (iRAT). You will then take the same Readiness Assurance Test as a team (a tRAT). After the RATs, we will explore the unit’s topic through short lectures and team application exercises.

Missed RATs can not be made up. If you will miss RATs for a university-excused absence, make plans to take the RAT prior to your absence.

#### 2. Litigation Strategy Project

Working individually or with a partner, you will formulate a litigation strategy designed to get the Supreme Court to overturn a decision that is currently good law (i.e. that is still valid). This project will require that you articulate a cogent legal argument and that you conduct research on (1) the establishment and subsequent treatment of your chosen precedent, (2) individual justices’ decision-making in related cases, and (3) the political context from the time the precedent was announced to today.

Your final paper will be due Friday, May 4. Intermediate assignments related to the paper will be due throughout the semester.

#### 3. Peer Evaluations

You will complete peer evaluations at multiple points during the semester. You will be evaluated on both the quality of feedback you provide about your teammates’ performances and on how your teammates evaluate your performance.

#### 4. Final Exam

There will be one exam in the course. The exam will be administered during the course’s scheduled final exam period (Tuesday, May 8 at 1:30 pm) in our regular classroom.

### Plan Ahead

**All readings for a unit are due on the first day of the unit. You will read fewer pages per unit than you would in a traditional course, but your reading assignments will be concentrated to facilitate team-based learning activities.**

### Attendance

You are expected to attend class and to actively participate. Failure to do so will affect your peer evaluation scores. Attendance may be taken into account in responding to special requests and in deciding borderline grades.
Grading Policies

Your grade will be based on the components described on the previous page—individual Readiness Assurance Tests (iRATs), team performance (team RATs and in-class activities), peer evaluations, a final exam, and assignments related to your litigation strategy project.

The class will have a role in determining how these assignments are weighted. I have set the assignments weights for team-related course components and set minimum weights for individual work. The class will choose how to allocate the remaining 25% points across the individual course components during our first class meeting.

Course assignments will be weighted according to the weights chosen on the first day of class. Scores will be rounded to the nearest whole number and then letter grades will be assigned according to the scale below.

- 90-100% = A
- 80-89% = B
- 70-79% = C
- 60-69% = D
- <60% = F

Late assignments will be penalized 10 points (1 letter grade) for each 24 hour period they are late.

There are no opportunities for extra credit. Plan accordingly.

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Minimum Weight</th>
<th>Class Points Allocated</th>
<th>Assignment Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team Performance</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Evaluations</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>iRATs</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Litigation Strategy Project</td>
<td>20</td>
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|                       | 25             | 100                    |

Need Help? ASK!

If you need help, contact me via Slack or see me during office hours. I want you to succeed in this course and to enjoy learning about the Supreme Court. If you are having difficulty with the material, let me know so we can ensure that you get the most out of the time and effort you put into the course! If an emergency arises that prevents you from meeting course-related expectations, let me know. I will do my best to direct you to available campus resources and, where necessary, to make reasonable accommodations.

Semester-at-a-Glance

**Tuesday, January 23:** Unit 1 RATs

**Tuesday, February 13:** Unit 2 RATs

**Friday, February 23:** Plagiarism Recognition Assignment Due

**Tuesday, March 6:** Unit 3 RATs

**Friday, March 9:** Peer Evaluations Due

**Friday, March 23:** Paper Proposal Due

**Tuesday, April 3:** Unit 4 RATs

**Thursday, April 19:** Unit 5 RATs

**Friday, April 13:** Preliminary Research Assignment Due

**Friday, May 4:** Litigation Strategy Papers Due by 11:59 pm

**Tuesday, May 8 @ 1:30 pm:** Final Exam

**Tuesday, May 8:** Peer Evaluations Due
Relevant University Policies

Academic Integrity
Academic integrity is defined in the UNT Policy on Student Standards for Academic Integrity. Any suspected case of academic dishonesty will be handled in accordance with the University Policy and procedures. Possible academic penalties range from a verbal or written admonition to a grade of F in the course. Further sanctions may apply to incidents involving major violations. You will find the policy and procedures at http://facultysuccess.unt.edu/academic-integrity.

Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance
The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodation at any time, however ODA notices of reasonable 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 reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the ODA website at http://www.unt.edu/oda. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

Classroom Conduct
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 Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities 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 classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct.

Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, and Assault
UNT is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these acts of aggression, please know that you are not alone. The federal Title IX law makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are civil rights offenses. UNT has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more. UNT’s Dean of Students website offers a range of on-campus and off-campus resources to help support survivors, depending on their unique needs: http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources. Renee LeClaire McNamara is UNT’s Student Advocate and she can be reached through e-mail at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students’ office at 940-565-2648. You are not alone. We are here to help.

Emergency Notification & Procedures
UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify you with critical information in an event of emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). The system sends voice messages (and text messages upon permission) to the phones of all active faculty staff, and students. Please make certain to update your phone numbers at www.my.unt.edu. Some helpful emergency preparedness actions include: 1) ensuring you know the evacuation routes and severe weather shelter areas, determining how you will contact family and friends if phones are temporarily unavailable, and identifying where you will go if you need to evacuate the Denton area suddenly. In the event of a university closure, your instructor will communicate with you through Blackboard regarding assignments, exams, field trips, and other items that may be impacted by the closure.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Getting Started

Tuesday, January 16: Introduction to the Course
Read the syllabus.
Access the course Canvas site at http://unt.instructure.com
Join the PSCI 3210 Slack workspace. https://psci3210.slack.com

Thursday, January 18: Introduction to the Supreme Court

Unit 1: The U.S. Supreme Court as a Political Institution. Are courts different?

**RATs: Tuesday, January 23**

**Team Activities:** Thursday, January 25

**Team Activities:** Tuesday, January 30

**Team Activities:** Tuesday, February 6

**Team Activities:** Thursday, February 8

* We will not meet on Thursday, February 1.

Readings (complete all by January 23)

   - Chapter 1, “The Court,” pages 1-27
   - Chapter 5, “Policy Outputs,” pages 152-182


Unit 2: Supreme Court Policymaking

**RATs:** Tuesday, February 13

**Team Activities:** Thursday, February 15
Tuesday, February 20
Tuesday, February 27
Thursday, March 1

*We will not meet on Thursday, February 22.*

*Plagiarism Detection Assignment due Friday, February 23.*

**Readings** (complete all by February 13)

   Chapter 6, “The Court’s Impact,” pages 183-223
   Chapter 9, “Judicial Policymaking: An Introduction”
   Chapter 1, “Neither Force Nor Will,” pages 1-5.

Unit 3: Supreme Court Processes

**RATs:** Tuesday, March 6

**Litigation Strategy Project Overview:** Thursday, March 8

**Team Activities:** Tuesday, March 20
Thursday, March 22
Tuesday, March 27
Thursday, March 29

*Peer Evaluations due Friday, March 9.*

*We will not meet the week of March 12 (Spring Break).*

*Paper Proposals due Friday, March 23.*

**Readings** (complete all by March 6)

   Chapter 3, “The Cases,” pages 67-103
   Chapter 4, “Decision Making,” pages 104-113 (Stop at “Influences on Decisions: Introduction.”)
Unit 4: Decision Making

RATs: Tuesday, April 3

Team Activities: Thursday, April 5

Tuesday, April 10

Thursday, April 12

Tuesday, April 17

* Preliminary Research Assignment due Friday, April 13.

Readings (complete all by April 3)

   Chapter 4, “Decision Making,” pages 113-151 (From “Influences on Decisions: Introduction” to end of chapter.)


   Chapter 1, “A Realistic Theory of Judicial Behavior,” pages 25-64
   Chapter 3, “The Supreme Court,” pages 101-152


   Chapter 1, “Who They Are and What They Want,” pages 1-13
   Chapter 2, “Goals and Personality,” pages 13-31
   Chapter 9, “Behind the Black Robes,” pages 150-156

Unit 5: Staffing the Bench

RATs: Thursday, April 19

Team Activities: Tuesday, April 24

Thursday, April 26

Tuesday, May 1

Thursday, May 3

* Litigation Strategy Papers due Friday, May 4.

* Final Exam Tuesday, May 8 at 1:30 pm.

* Peer Evaluations due Tuesday, May 8.

Readings (complete all by April 19)


