University of North Texas-Department of Political Science

PSCI 3200.001, American Legal System, Spring 2011

Wooten Hall 115

MWF: 11:00 am – 11:50 am

Instructor: Eddie L. Meaders, J.D., M.A.

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Political Science Department Phone: (940) 565 - 2276

E-mail: meaders@unt.edu

Office Hours:

M, W: 10:00 am – 11:00 am; 1:00pm - 3:00 pm

T: 10:00am -12:00 pm; 1:00 – 3:00 pm

F: 10:00 am – 11:00 am

Feel free to drop by. If the posted hours are no good, let me

know and we’ll set something else up.

Required Texts:

Carp, Robert A., Ronald Stidham, and Kenneth L. Manning. 2011. *Judicial Process in America*, 8th Edition. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

Course Description: This course explores the intricacies of the American legal system on both the state and federal levels. We will examine the nature and origins of law, court structures, the legal profession, the judiciary, the role of interest groups in litigation, criminal and civil trials and procedures, and the appellate process.

Class Procedure: This class will be conducted in a lecture/discussion format. Students are encouraged to actively participate in class discussions. READ AND PREPARE FOR THEM! Your views, opinions, and questions are valued no matter how insignificant or controversial you may feel them to be. Please do not feel inhibited by the size of the class in expressing your views. Warm bodies only fill up space and are not very exciting unless they say something.

Attendance: Why pay all that tuition for a class you are not going to attend?

**ATTEND CLASS AND TRY TO ARRIVE ON TIME! ATTENDANCE WILL NOT BE TAKEN, BUT I WILL BE COGNIZANT OF THOSE WHO MISS. THIS MIGHT AFFECT YOUR CLASS PARTICIPATION GRADE. POOR ATTENDANCE AND A FAILING GRADE HAVE FINANCIAL AID CONSEQUENCES!**

Disabled Students: If you are physically challenged, every attempt will be made to accommodate your educational needs. Talk to me by the end of the first week of class so that we can make appropriate arrangements. This class operates in accordance with the Office of Disability requirements here at the University of North Texas and pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990).

Examinations: A necessary evil. There will be two (2) of them consisting of a midterm and a final. Exams, which are closed book/notes, will consist of multiple choice, true-false, and short answer/identification questions. The exams are non-cumulative in the sense that they focus on the specific topics and reading assignments delineated by each section. Anything in the lectures, class discussion, and assigned readings is fair game for exam questions. **I do not discuss exam results during the 24 hours following the return of graded exams to the class.**

Written Assignment:

***Courthouse Journal***. Go to a courthouse\*(Denton County, Dallas County, Tarrant County, Collin County, etc.) or the federal courthouse in Dallas, Fort Worth, or Sherman and watch what goes on. At a minimum, observe two (2) each of the following: 1) felony proceeding in state or federal district court; 2) misdemeanor proceeding in the county court at law; 3) any type of civil proceeding (business litigation, tort, child custody, divorce, etc.) in state or federal district court, 4) appellate argument in either the Dallas Court of Appeals or the Fort Worth Court of Appeals; 5) probate proceeding in county probate court; 6) traffic case proceedings in a justice of the peace or municipal court. From your observations determine what court you are observing (i.e., the 259th Judicial District Court of Jones County), style of the case (*Texas v. Delay*), the nature of the case, and who the judge is. Tell me what you saw (jury selection, opening arguments, testimony of witnesses, lawyers huddled around the bench talking to the judge, etc.) and then tell me your impressions about what was observed. Did it meet your expectations and was it similar to what was discussed in the text and in class? You may use personal experiences with the legal system (traffic tickets, etc.), but only if they take place during the semester. If given the opportunity, talk to the lawyers involved, or even the judge. Some will ask you what you are doing. Write all of this up in a typed paper no less than eight (8) and no more than ten (10) pages, double-spaced with a 12-point font and standard margins. **THE PAPER IS DUE AT THE START OF CLASS ON TUESDAY, May 2nd!** If it is late, you lose a letter grade! **FAILURE TO COMPLETE THIS ASSIGNMENT WILL RESULT IN A FAILING CLASS GRADE.**

**\* DRESS ACCORDINGLY WHEN YOU GO TO COURT! No gum chewing; no cell phones; no talking!**

Final Exam: The final is scheduled for **MONDAY, May 9th, 10:30 am – 12:30 pm; WH 115.** It will not be comprehensive!

Grades: A necessary evil. Your grade will be determined by the following criteria:

Exams = 60%

Written Assignment = 30%

Class participation = 10%

I reserve the right to add or subtract up to a total of three (3) points to or from your final average based upon participation and general attitude. This is where good attendance can pay off.

Academic Integrity, Plagiarism and Cheating : Perish the thought and do not yield to temptation! The Political Science Department adheres to and enforces UNT’s policy on academic integrity (cheating, plagiarism, forgery, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty and sabotage). Students in this class should review the policy (UNT Policy Manual Section 18.1.16), which may be located at <http://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/untpolicy/pdf/7-Student_Affairs-Academic_Integrity.pdf>. Violations of academic integrity in this course will addressed in compliance with the penalties and procedures laid out in this policy. Please sign the last sheet of the syllabus when you return your information sheet to indicate you have read the policy.

Miscellaneous Poop: If you miss class, it is incumbent on you to be responsible for the notes. You should ask one of your colleagues for notes in the unlikely event that you miss class. I do not mind if you use a laptop or recording devices during lectures. **PLEASE TURN CELL PHONES OFF DURING CLASS! RINGING AND BEEPING CAUSE DISTRACTIONS. IF THIS HAPPENS, I MAY ANSWER YOUR PHONE FOR YOU, OR AT LEAST CONFISCATE IT FOR THE DURATION OF THE CLASS PERIOD!**

I reserve the right to change any of the exam times or assignments by providing you with at least a 48 hour notice of such changes. You are responsible for any changes that may occur during the course of the semester. Any changes will be announced at the end of each class.

Tentative Coming Attractions

(More or Less)

Week 1 January 19, 21

Chapter 1, Foundations of Law in the U.S.

Week 2 January 24, 26, 28

Chapter 1 continued; Chapter 2, Federal Judicial History and Organization

Week 3 January 31, February 2, 4

Chapter 3, State Judicial History and Organization

Week 4 February 7, 9, 11

Chapter 4, Jurisdiction & Policy-Making Boundaries

Week 5 February 14, 16, 18

Chapter 5, State Judges

Week 6 February 21, 23, 25

Chapter 6, Federal Judges

Week 7 February 28, March 2, 4

Chapter 7, Policy Links between the Citizenry, the President, and the Federal Judiciary

Week 8 March 7, 9, 11

**MIDTERM EXAM** on the 7th!

Chapter 8, Lawyers, Litigants, and Interest Groups

**March 14, 16, 18**

**Spring Break. No Class!**

Week 9 March 21, 23, 25

Chapters 9 & 10, Criminal Court Process and Procedures

Week 10 March 28, 30, April 1

More crime; Chapter 11, the Civil Court Process;

Week 11 April 4, 6, 8

Chapter 12, Decision Making by Trial Court Judges

Week 12 April 11, 13, 15

Chapter 13, Decision –Making in Collegial Courts;

Week 13 April 18, 20, 22

More decision making

Week 14 April 25, 27, 29

Chapter 14, Implementation and Impact of Judicial Policies

Week 15 May 2, 4, 6

Chapter 15, Policymaking by American Judges: a Synthesis

**PAPERS DUE ON THE 2nd!**

Week 16 May 9

**FINAL EXAM on Monday, May 9th! 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM, WH 115.**

PSCI 3200.001, Spring 2011

Student Information Sheet

(Please Print)

Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Phone:( )\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Hometown:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Year in School:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Transfer (if so, which school):\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Major:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Minor:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Hobbies and interesting things you like to do:

This certifies that I have read the syllabus and understand the requirements for the course, including the Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism. I agree to abide by the academic integrity policy. As such, I verify that all work done in this class will be my own.

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_