

Professor Tom Hansford
thansford@ucmerced.edu
Office Hours: Tues. & Thurs. 2-3pm
(In my personal Zoom meeting room <https://ucmerced.zoom.us/j/4346327114>)

POLI 102: Judicial Politics Fall 2020

Course Description:

This course will provide students with a broad survey of the current state of the theory, substantive knowledge, and research methods in the field of judicial politics. While the primary emphasis of this course will be on the U.S. Supreme Court, we will also spend time discussing lower federal courts and state supreme courts. Specific topics include the selection of judges, judicial decision making, external political influences on the judiciary (including Congress, interest groups, and the public), and the “real world” effects of landmark Supreme Court decisions. Throughout the course, we will take a social scientific approach to studying judges and courts. This means we will consider theories of judicial behavior and judicial institutions and then consider the ways in which these theories have and can be empirically tested.

Instructional Format:

Due to pandemic-related health and safety concerns, this course is offered via “remote instruction.” Each week, I will provide a lecture (via Zoom) on Tuesday at our officially scheduled time (12:00-1:15pm). I will record the lecture and post it on CatCourses, so you have the choice of attending live or watching the recording. In lieu of a second class meeting each week, there will either be an activity, assignment, or quiz. More details below....

This is my first time teaching this class “remotely,” so there will be a learning process for me. I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, if needed. Any changes I make will be clearly communicated and with the class’ interests in mind.

Intended Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

1. Communicate a thorough factual understanding of the structure and operation of our federal judicial system (corresponds to PLOs 1 and 4, listed below).
2. Demonstrate knowledge of the central questions, theories, approaches, and findings in the field of judicial politics (corresponds to PLO 1).
3. Comprehend and critique contemporary political science research on law and courts (corresponds to PLO 2).

General Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for Political Science:

1. An understanding of the processes, theories, and empirical regularities of political institutions and political behavior in the student’s chosen emphasis area: American politics, comparative politics, or international relations.
2. An ability to employ critical thinking and demonstrate social scientific literacy, including basic quantitative literacy.
3. A capacity to utilize contemporary social science research methods to conduct rigorous research on political phenomena.
4. Effective written communication skills, especially the ability to convey complex concepts and information in a clear and concise manner.
5. An ability to apply abstract theory and research methods to understand contemporary political events and public policies.

Prerequisites:

The official prerequisites for this course are POLI 1 and POLI 10 (or equivalent, e.g., ECON 10, PSY 10, SOC 10, or SOC 15). Please be aware that assignments for this class will require you to work with and analyze data.

Required Readings:

Baum, Lawrence. 2018. *The Supreme Court*. 13th ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Epstein, Lee, and Jack Knight. 1998. *The Choices Justices Make*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Additional required readings are assigned below and will be made available on CatCourses.

Teaching Assistant:

Reagan Dobbs (rdobbs2@ucmerced.edu)

Grades:

Quizzes: 30%
Activities: 30%
Assignments 40%

Quizzes – There will be five multiple choice question quizzes. Each quiz will be administered through CatCourses and will be given at noon on the scheduled date (see below). These quizzes will help assess the degree to which you attain SLOs 1, 2, and 3.

Activities – There will be five activities, which need to be completed by midnight on the scheduled date (see below). I will provide detail on each activity on the preceding Tuesday.

Assignments – There will be four assignments, which need to be turned in by midnight on the scheduled due date (see below). I will provide instructions for each assignment at least one week in advance of the due date. These assignments will require data analysis, as well as presentation and discussion of results.. These assignments will help assess the degree to which you attain SLOs 1, 2, and 3.

Extra credit – You may earn up to 3 percentage points of extra credit towards your final grade in one of two ways: 1) participation in the UC Merced subject pool (through SONA) or 2) an additional writing assignment. If you want to pursue either option you must sign up at the beginning of the semester.

Your final grade for the course will be assigned in the following manner:

A	93% - 100%
A-	90% - 92%
B+	87% - 89%
B	83% - 86%
B-	80% - 86%
C+	77% - 79%
C	73% - 76%
C-	70% - 72%
D+	67% - 69%
D	63% - 66%
D-	60% - 62%
F	Below 60%

Policies:

Academic dishonesty – I have no tolerance for academic dishonesty. I will not hesitate to report and pursue action against anyone who plagiarizes the work of others, cheats on an exam, or otherwise engages in dishonest academic practices. Please consult the UC Merced Academic Honesty Policy.

Late assignments – Please turn in your assignments on time. Assignments will be penalized one letter grade per day they are late (weekends count as one day), regardless of the reason for why they are late.

Special accommodations – If you qualify for accommodations due to a disability, please provide me with a letter from Disability Services within the first few weeks of the semester. Student Affairs determines accommodations based on documented disabilities.

Ownership of course materials – Per the University of California’s Copyright Ownership Policy and Policy on Ownership of Course Materials, I assert ownership of all the course materials I have developed, including lecture content (including Zoom recordings), assignments, quizzes, slides, and syllabus. *Without my express written consent, you may not distribute any of these materials to anyone.*

Class Schedule:

- Week 1** Lecture (8/27): Introduction to the class
- Week 2** Lecture (9/1): Courts in the U.S.
Reading: *The Supreme Court*, Chapter 1
Activity (9/3): Learn about the structure and selection of a state judiciary (due 9/4)
- Week 3** Lecture (9/8): Selection of federal judges
Reading: *The Supreme Court*, Chapter 2
Assignment: Presidential appointment effects (due 9/15)
- Week 4** Lecture (9/15): Selection of state judges
Reading: “The Effects of Campaign Spending in State Supreme Court Elections”
Activity (9/17): Debate selection methods
- Week 5** Lecture (9/22): Case selection at the Supreme Court
Reading: *The Supreme Court*, Chapter 3
Quiz (9/24)
- Week 6** Lecture (9/29): Deciding cases I
Reading: *The Supreme Court*, Chapters 4 & 5
Activity (10/1): Listen to oral arguments in a recent case
- Week 7** Lecture (10/6): Deciding cases II
Assignment: Analyze the decisions of the 2018 Court Term (due 10/13)
- Week 8** Lecture (10/13): Opinion writing
Reading: *The Choices Justices Make*, Chapters 1-4
Quiz (10/15)
- Week 9** Lecture (10/20): Congressional constraint?
Reading: *The Choices Justices Make*, pp. 138-157
Activity (10/22): TBD

- Week 10** Lecture (10/27): Presidential influence?
Reading: “A Built-In Advantage: The Office of the Solicitor General and the Supreme Court”
Quiz (10/29):
- Week 11** Lecture (11/3): Organized interests and legal advocacy
Reading: “The Supply of Amicus Curiae Briefs in the Market for Information at the USSC”
Assignment: Detecting “plagiarism” of amicus briefs (due 11/10)
- Week 12** Lecture (11/10): Public awareness and perceptions of the Court
Reading: “The Legitimacy of the U.S. Supreme Court in a Polarized Polity”
Activity (11/12): Administer survey and discuss results
- Week 13** Lecture (11/17): The influence of public opinion?
Quiz (11/19)
- Week 14** Lecture (11/24): Implementation and impact of Court decisions
Reading: *The Supreme Court*, Chapter 6
Assignment: Analyzing compliance with Supreme Court decisions (due 12/8)
- Week 15** Lecture (12/1): Impact of Court decisions on civil rights
Reading: “Beyond Backlash: Assessing the Impact of Judicial Decisions on LGBT Rights”
- Week 16** Lecture (12/8): Impact of Court decisions on law enforcement
Quiz (12/10)