This course provides an introduction to the study of law and courts as political institutions and judges as political actors. Topics include judicial behavior and policymaking, the politics of selecting judges, the role of public opinion in shaping judicial doctrine, and the impact of courts on society. The primary institutional focus is the U.S. Supreme Court, but we also study other courts, including the state supreme courts and lower federal courts. Because this is an American Pluralism course, a major objective is to increase knowledge of how reform groups have used the courts to combat discrimination based on race, sex, and sexual orientation. As a Methods-Intensive course, it is also designed to familiarize you with methods of conducting research about the courts.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course you will be able to:

- Identify and debate the leading theories of judicial behavior and impact
- Understand the process of judging on the Supreme Court and other courts
- Familiarize yourself with legal terms and concepts relating to judicial behavior and process
- Analyze and interpret social science tables and figures about the courts
- Design a research project to investigate judging scientifically

Required Texts


Course Structure:

You should know that our course is structured as an online hybrid course. That means the course will be semi-asynchronous—you may work on the course at any time and anywhere, but we will come together to discuss themes relating to particular units twice a week. It is important to familiarize yourself with a unit's content before we discuss it in class, even if you find it helpful to devote additional time to studying the unit after our discussion.

The course has nine units organized into five modules, and it is five weeks long. Each of the nine units corresponds to a particular meeting session and features original web learning content, assigned readings, and additional media content that has been custom-tailored to your primary textbook for the course, Judicial Behavior & Policymaking. Because much of the work for this
course is completed online, online attendance is required for students to gain the maximum of benefit from this course. It is expected that all students will be online a minimum of two extended periods each week, to complete assignments as well as to participate in online asynchronous discussions. Students are strongly encouraged to interact with their fellow classmates, either electronically or in person, depending upon their interests and time availabilities.

Calendar:

**Module I: Introduction: Courts of Law or Justice (5/29-31)**

5/30 Discussion of Units 1&2: Judges as Policymakers

**Module II: Theories of Judicial Behavior (6/4-8)**

6/4 Discussion of Unit 3: The Attitudinal Model

6/6 Discussion of Unit 4: Other Theories of Judicial Behavior

**Module III: Courts and the American Public (6/11-15)**

6/11 Discussion of Unit 5: Selecting and Retaining Judges

6/13 Discussion of Unit 6: The Direct Impact of Public Opinion

**Module IV: The Impact of Courts (6/18-25)**

6/18 Discussion of Unit 7: The Dynamic Court Model

6/20 Discussion of Unit 8: The Constrained Court Model

6/25 Discussion of Unit 9: Other Theories of Judicial Impact

**Module V: End of Term Assignments (6/25-28)**

6/27 Final Class Session

Contact Me:

Our biggest challenge at the beginning will be negotiating the online environment and getting to know each other. So, if you need any help, please feel free to contact me via email at rhume@fordham.edu. I am looking forward to an exciting and productive learning experience!