Description

Scheduled for the month when the Supreme Court typically makes landmark decisions, 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 Supreme Court nominations, the role of public opinion in shaping judicial doctrine, and the impact of courts on society. A major objective of the course is to increase knowledge of how reform groups have used the courts to combat discrimination based on race, sex, and sexual orientation. The course also explores how the structure of the legal system systematically advantages some litigants more than others based on class. Fulfills the Advanced Social Science and Pluralism requirements in Fordham's core curriculum. The summer 2020 version of this course is fully online with virtual meetings via Zoom on Mondays and Wednesdays from 6:00-9:00 PM. Additional online participation, and the completion of asynchronous modules, is required.

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 Text


Course Schedule (via Zoom)

Module I: Introduction: Courts of Law or Justice (5/27-6/1)

5/27  Discussion of Unit 1: The Supreme Court as a National Policymaker
6/1   Discussion of Unit 2: Behind the Scenes at the U.S. Supreme Court

Module II: Theories of Judicial Behavior (6/3-6/10)

6/3   Discussion of Unit 3: The Attitudinal Model
6/10 Discussion of Unit 5: The Strategic Model

Module III: Courts and the American Public (6/15-6/17)
6/15 Discussion of Unit 6: Selecting and Retaining Judges
6/17 Discussion of Unit 7: The Direct Impact of Public Opinion

Module IV: The Impact of Courts (6/22-24)
6/22 Discussion of Unit 8: The Dynamic Court Model
6/24 Discussion of Unit 9: The Constrained Court Model

Assignments

The course is structured as an online hybrid course, which means that the course will be semi-asynchronous—you may work on the course anytime and anywhere, but we will come together to discuss units twice a week, via Zoom, on Monday and Wednesday evenings from 6:00 to 9:00. The asynchronous online component is via Blackboard. 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 in-class Zoom discussions.

The course has nine units organized into four modules and it is five weeks long. Each of the nine units corresponds to a particular Zoom session and features original web learning content, assigned readings, and additional media content that has been custom-tailored to your textbook for the course. Because much of the work for this course is completed online, asynchronous online attendance is required for students to gain the maximum 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 asynchronous discussions.

Discussion Board Postings (20%). Each unit includes a discussion question and a link to the discussion board. Before we discuss each unit in our Zoom sessions, write a one paragraph response to the discussion question and post it on the board. Your responses do not need to be formal, but they should demonstrate that you have read and reflected on the assigned material in the unit. You are free (and encouraged) to read other posted responses and respond to them when you are writing your response. Please note that the first discussion board response is due on the day of our first Zoom meeting, on 5/27 (W). To assist with this assignment, as a courtesy from the publisher, a link to the first chapter of the textbook is provided in Unit 1.

Paper Assignment (30%). This term you will be writing a paper that explains the outcome of a landmark Supreme Court decision of your choice. But instead of writing the whole paper at once, you will be constructing it piece by piece, over a series of weeks. The installments are brief (three paragraphs each) and due every Friday. You can find details on the Assignments tab.

Exam (30%). There will be one take-home final exam, with questions handed out electronically on the last day of class, on 6/24 (W), and due one week later, on 7/1 (W) at NOON.

Participation (20%). Participation is a major component of the course. Be sure to come to our Zoom meetings prepared to discuss the materials from the units for each day.