

PSC 332: The Judicial Process

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Summer II 2016

1 Course Description

As Americans, much of what we know about our legal system comes from the television. We learn about criminal justice from shows like “Law and Order” and we learn about trials on shows like “Perry Mason” or “Boston Legal.” Indeed, one of the first reality shows on television was “The People’s Court,” and the real-life legal drama surrounding our most famous people (O.J., Kobe, and Michael, to name a few) continues to captivate the American public. In fact, some people have become famous just because of their involvement with the court system (Casey Anthony, George Zimmerman, Conrad Murray, etc.).

While some of the information we get from popular culture is grounded in fact, much of it is not. In order to gain a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the role of courts in America, we will augment our popular perceptions with evidence from theoretical and empirical research. We will also be investigating the social and political impact of our justice system on different segments of society.

The main aim of this course is to systematically answer questions and dispel the myths surrounding the American legal system. We will begin with a basic introduction to the structure and function of our court system and judicial selection. We will discuss the role of judges and other court actors, both in terms of what they should do and what they actually do. We will examine the function of courts as they address matters of criminal law and civil law, focusing specifically on the consequences of various attributes of criminal and civil procedure. Next, we will study the appellate process. We will conclude the term with a look at how the courts fit in to the larger political landscape, and how they work to shape life and law in America.

2 Course Objectives

After completing this course, the successful student will:

1. Have a working knowledge of American court system structure, function, and procedures;
2. Understand the way that procedures and institutions impact the nature of justice that results;
3. Be able to analyze the merit of particular legal arguments and approaches, both from a socio-political and legal perspective;

4. Interpret the various outcomes of the court system in terms of the political, institutional and social characteristics of the American legal system; and
5. Be able to contribute meaningfully to the current debate about judicial selection in the American states.

3 Required Materials

- Corley, Ward, and Martinek. 2016. *American Judicial Process: Myth and reality in Law and Courts*. Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-415-53298-3.
- The course WebCampus page.

4 Requirements & Evaluation

This course is taken completely online. All assignments must be completed online through the course WebCampus page by the time and date indicated. Please be sure to check your WebCampus and RebelMail accounts regularly throughout the term. Your grade will be assigned on the basis of my assessment of your work according to the scheme laid out below.

4.1 Quizzes

40% of Final Grade. Each module has specific has a specific set of readings. You should complete the readings before beginning the module. Each module consists of multimedia materials to help you make sense of the readings and they presuppose your familiarity with the facts and concepts from the readings. At the end of each module, there will be a short quiz. The quiz will contain elements from the module, but it will also include questions about information from the readings that weren't presented in the module. Your quiz grades make up 40% of the overall grade. They are not timed, but all of the quizzes must be completed by Friday at 6pm of the week for which they have been assigned. You may take each quiz up to two times, although the questions will likely be different the second time around. Don't worry, though; only your highest score of the two attempts will count. Missed quizzes cannot be made up, so make sure you take these on time!

4.2 Participation

20% of Final Grade. Because of the online format of the course, all of the participation will take place through WebCampus. The discussions will happen in groups, which will be assigned randomly in WebCampus on the first day of class. Each of the groups will consider the same weekly question; the group setting is intended to make the conversations more manageable and meaningful for students. On Monday of each week, a new conversation thread will open up in your group. The conversation starter will be a general topic, and it will be followed by several specific questions. By Wednesday at 5pm, each student in the group must answer a question that nobody else in the group has answered yet. By Sunday at 5pm, each student must respond to the posts of the other students in the group. Participation counts for 20% of the overall grade.

4.3 Final Exam

40% of Final Grade The final exam must be taken sometime on the last Friday of the course, 7/8. You may begin the exam anytime that day before 10:00 pm, and you will be allotted two hours to complete the exam. The exam will cover information from the quizzes, but it will also include material from the readings, the modules, and the discussion boards. It is a cumulative exam, and it is intended to confirm that students have mastered the material. The course is open book, but rules against plagiarism and academic dishonesty apply. Collaboration is not allowed. General use of internet sources and searches are *not allowed* for the test. You may consult the material from the course, but you should not be Googling the questions in an attempt to find the answers.

5 Schedule of Topics

- Week 1 (June 6-10) – Courts and Lawyers
 1. Read *American Judicial Process* chapters 1-3.
 2. Complete the Week 1 module.
 3. Take Quiz 1 before 6 pm on June 10.
- Week 2 (June 13-17) - Court Organization and Staffing
 1. Read *American Judicial Process* chapters 4-5.
 2. Complete the Week 2 module.
 3. Take Quiz 2 before 6 pm on June 17.
- Week 3 (June 20-24) - Criminal and Civil Law
 1. Read *American Judicial Process* chapters 6-7.
 2. Complete the Week 3 module.
 3. Take Quiz 3 before 6 pm on June 17.
- Week 4 (June 27- July 1) - Trials and Appeals
 1. Read *American Judicial Process* chapters 8-9.
 2. Complete the Week 4 module.
 3. Take Quiz 4 before 6 pm on July 1.
- Week 5 (July 4-8) - Courts as Policymaking Institutions
 1. Read *American Judicial Process* chapters 10-11.
 2. Complete the Week 5 module.
 3. Take Quiz 5 before 6 pm on July 8.
 4. Take the **Final Exam** on July 8, starting sometime before 10:00 pm.

6 University Policies

6.1 Academic Misconduct

Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Student Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV's function as an educational institution. An example of academic misconduct is plagiarism. Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of another, from the Internet or any source, without proper citation of the sources. See the Student Academic Misconduct Policy (approved December 9, 2005) located at: <http://studentconduct.unlv.edu/misconduct/policy.html>.

6.2 Copyright

The University requires all members of the University Community to familiarize themselves with and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. You are individually and solely responsible for violations of copyright and fair use laws. The university will neither protect nor defend you nor assume any responsibility for employee or student violations of fair use laws. Violations of copyright laws could subject you to federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability, as well as disciplinary action under University policies. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.unlv.edu/provost/copyright>.

6.3 Disability Resource Center (DRC)

The UNLV Disability Resource Center (SSC-A 143, <http://drc.unlv.edu/>, 702-895-0866) provides resources for students with disabilities. If you feel that you have a disability, please make an appointment with a Disabilities Specialist at the DRC to discuss what options may be available to you.

If you are registered with the UNLV Disability Resource Center, bring your Academic Accommodation Plan from the DRC to me during office hours so that we may work together to develop strategies for implementing the accommodations to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. Any information you provide is private and will be treated as such. To maintain the confidentiality of your request, please do not approach me before or after class to discuss your accommodation needs.

6.4 Religious Holidays Policy

Any student missing class quizzes, examinations, or any other class or lab work because of observance of religious holidays shall be given an opportunity during that semester to make up missed work. The make-up will apply to the religious holiday absence only. It shall be the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor no later than the end of the first two weeks of classes, September 5, 2014, of his or her intention to participate in religious holidays which do not fall on state holidays or periods of class recess. For additional information, please visit: <http://catalog.unlv.edu/content.php?catoid=6&navoid=531>.

6.5 Incomplete Grades

The grade of I – Incomplete – can be granted when a student has satisfactorily completed three-fourths of course work for that semester/session but for reason(s) beyond the student’s control, and acceptable to the instructor, cannot complete the last part of the course, and the instructor believes that the student can finish the course without repeating it. The incomplete work must be made up before the end of the following regular semester. If course requirements are not completed within the time indicated, a grade of F will be recorded and the GPA will be adjusted accordingly. Students who are fulfilling an Incomplete do not register for the course but make individual arrangements with the instructor who assigned the I grade.

6.6 Tutoring

The Academic Success Center (ASC) provides tutoring and academic assistance for all UNLV students taking UNLV courses. Students are encouraged to stop by the ASC to learn more about subjects offered, tutoring times and other academic resources. The ASC is located across from the Student Services Complex (SSC). Students may learn more about tutoring services by calling 702-895-3177 or visiting the tutoring web site at: <http://academicsuccess.unlv.edu/tutoring/>.

6.7 UNLV Writing Center

One-on-one or small group assistance with writing is available free of charge to UNLV students at the Writing Center, located in CDC-3-301. Although walk-in consultations are sometimes available, students with appointments will receive priority assistance. Appointments may be made in person or by calling 702-895-3908. The student’s Rebel ID Card, a copy of the assignment (if possible), and two copies of any writing to be reviewed are requested for the consultation. More information can be found at: <http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/>

6.8 Rebelmail

By policy, faculty and staff should e-mail students’ Rebelmail accounts only. Rebelmail is UNLV’s official e-mail system for students. It is one of the primary ways students receive official university communication such as information about deadlines, major campus events, and announcements. All UNLV students receive a Rebelmail account after they have been admitted to the university. Students’ e-mail prefixes are listed on class rosters. The suffix is always @unlv.nevada.edu.