

PSCI 3200.001, American Legal System, Fall 2026
MW: 11:10 am – 12:30 pm, WH 121
Course Syllabus

Instructor

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

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Office Hours: Walk In, WH 141, Monday and Wednesday 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Tuesday Zooms: 1:30 pm – 3:30 pm: <https://unt.zoom.us/j/81643426903>

Feel free to drop by. If the posted hours are not good let me know and we will set something else up.

Required Text

Carp, Robert A., Ronald Stidham, Kenneth L. Manning & Lisa M. Holmes. 2020. *Judicial Process in America*. 13th Edition. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage/CQ Press.

Read the book. It is not to be used as a paperweight, prop for your TV, or a coaster! Exams are based on textbook readings!

Course Objectives

This course explores the intricacies of the American legal system on both the state and federal levels. By the end of the semester, you should be able to identify and explain the nature and origins of law, court structures, the legal profession, the judiciary, judicial decision making, the role of interest groups in litigation, criminal and civil trials and procedures, the appellate process, and judicial policymaking.

Class Procedures

This class will be conducted in a lecture/discussion format. Students are encouraged to actively participate in class discussions. READ THE ASSIGNED CHAPTERS IN THE BOOK AND PREPARE FOR CLASS! Your views, opinions, and questions are valued no matter how insignificant or controversial you may feel them to be.

Course Expectations

A university course is a joint endeavor between instructor and students. We all have an important part to play.

As the instructor in this course, I am responsible for

- providing course materials that will give you the opportunity to achieve our course objectives and providing you with the tools to learn,
- providing timely feedback on your work and explaining concerns you may have with grading,
- and being fair in my implementation of rules and policies in the course.

As a student in this course, you are responsible for

- reading and completing all the requirements of the course in a timely manner,
- working to remain attentive and engaged in the course and interact with your fellow students,
- and assisting in maintaining a positive learning environment for everyone.

Attendance

Why pay for all that tuition for a class you are not going to attend? Class attendance will be taken regularly!

Final Grade

Exams - 60%

Courthouse Journal - 35%

Professionalism- 5%

Grades: (earned and not given). Your grade will be determined based on your scores earned in the following activities:

A range=89.5-100, B range=79.5-89.4, C range=69.5-79.4, D range =59.5-69.4

Your final grade is the culmination of work that you have done over the course of the semester. **It is not the product of bargaining for academic mercy at the end of the term.** Moreover, I cannot make an exception for one student without making it for all students, and that is never practical or fair.

Types of assignments

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. We will use laptops provided by the Sage Testing Center. Anything in the lectures, class discussion, and assigned readings is fair game for exam questions. **I do not discuss grades online.** Come to the office.

Notify the instructor in advance if you cannot take the exam on the designated day. If you miss an exam, contact the instructor within 3 days of the exam date so we can schedule a make-up time. Failure to do this means you will not be allowed to take the make up exam.

Written Assignment: ***Courthouse Journal***. Go to a courthouse* (Denton County, Dallas County, Tarrant County, Collin County,) or the federal courthouse in Dallas, Fort Worth, Plano, 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 which court you are observing (i.e., the 259th Judicial District Court of Jones County, Texas), style of the case (*Texas v. Voldemort*), 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,) and then tell me your impressions about what was observed. Did it meet your expectations and was it like what was discussed in the text and in class? You may use firsthand experiences with the legal system (traffic tickets), 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 twelve (12) pages, double-spaced with a 12-point font and standard margins. **AI may not be used for this assignment! You may not watch proceedings online. THE PAPER IS DUE AT 11:00 am, Monday November 30th in Canvas. DO NOT SEND ME AN E-COPY! LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED! FAILURE TO COMPLETE THIS ASSIGNMENT WILL RESULT IN A FAILING CLASS GRADE!**

- **DRESS APPROPRIATELY (BUSINESS CASUAL) WHEN YOU GO TO COURT! Bring a notebook to take notes. No gum chewing; no smoking; no vaping (it's pretty much banned in Texas anyway); no hats; turn your phones off, no talking; no screwing around!**

Final Exam: The final is scheduled for Saturday, **December 5th, 10:30 am – 12:30 pm, WH 121**. It will not be comprehensive!

Technical Stuff: Do not ask the instructor. I am not an expert. Contact the IT Help Desk: <https://it.unt.edu/>

Academic Integrity

The words “academic integrity,” entails a commitment to honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage.

- If work is found to be academically dishonest, we reserve the right to reassess past assignment submissions and regrade past assignments accordingly.
- If we discover or are made aware of any kind of cheating, plagiarism, or any other type of academic dishonesty, the assignment or exam will automatically receive a zero with no opportunity for resubmission. For definitions of these terms and concepts, see the by [UNT Student Academic Integrity Policy, 06.003](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- Academic integrity is paramount, especially in courses such as this one. Your instruction team will take cheating and any other academic integrity violation seriously, most likely by filing an Academic Integrity Violation report with the Office of the Provost.
- This includes any AI-generated content submitted as the student's own, or any other unauthorized use of AI.

Political Science Policy on Cheating & Plagiarism: Perish the thought and do not give in to temptation and the easy way! Political Science adheres to and enforces UNT’s policy on academic integrity. Academic Integrity is defined in the UNT Policy on Student Standards for Academic Integrity. Any suspected case of Academic Dishonesty will be handled in accordance with the University Policy and procedures. Possible academic penalties range from a verbal or written admonition to a grade of “F” in the course. Further sanctions may apply to incidents involving major violations. You will find the policy and procedures at: <http://facultysuccess.unt.edu/academic-integrity>. Review the policy!

AI Policy

The AI policy for this online class is very simple:

Any attempt to represent GenAI (or other artificial intelligence) output as a student’s own work will be considered plagiarism, fabrication, and/or cheating and will be subject to an academic integrity violation report.

Other Policies

ADA Policy: UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one’s specific course needs. Students may request

accommodation at any time; however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the [ODA website https://disability.unt.edu/](https://disability.unt.edu/) ().

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation: The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

Emergency Notification & Procedures: UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Retention of Student Records: Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. Visit UNT's [Code of Student Conduct](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct) (https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct) to learn more.

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Rules of Engagement: rules of engagement refer to the way students are expected to interact with each other and with their instructors. Here are some general guidelines:

- While the freedom to express yourself is a fundamental human right, any communication that utilizes cruel and derogatory language on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law will not be tolerated.
- Treat your instructor and classmates with respect in any communication online or face-to-face, even when their opinion differs from your own.
- Ask for and use the correct name and pronouns for your instructor and classmates.
- Speak from personal experiences. Use “I” statements to share thoughts and feelings. Try not to speak on behalf of groups or other individual’s experiences.
- Use your critical thinking skills to challenge other people’s ideas, instead of attacking individuals.
- Avoid using all caps while communicating digitally. This may be interpreted as “YELLING!”
- Be cautious when using humor or sarcasm in emails or discussion posts as tone can be difficult to interpret digitally.
- Avoid using “text-talk” unless explicitly permitted by your instructor.

University Information

Access to Information - Eagle Connect: Students’ access point for business and academic services at UNT is located at: my.unt.edu. All official communication from the University will be delivered to a student’s Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect and how to forward e-mail [Eagle Connect](https://it.unt.edu/eagleconnect) (<https://it.unt.edu/eagleconnect>).

Student Evaluation Administration Dates: Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during weeks 13, 14 and 15 [insert administration dates] of the long semesters to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should look for email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey, they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the [SPOT website](http://spot.unt.edu/) (<http://spot.unt.edu/>) or email spot@unt.edu.

Student Support Services

Mental Health: UNT provides mental health resources to students to help ensure there are numerous outlets to turn to that wholeheartedly care for and are there for students in need, regardless of the nature of an issue or its severity. Listed below are several resources on campus that can support your academic success and mental well-being:

- [Student Health and Wellness Center](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center) (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center)
- [Counseling and Testing Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services) (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services)
- [UNT Care Team](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care) (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care).

Survivor Advocacy: UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct. Federal laws and UNT policies prohibit discrimination based on sex as well as sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-5652648.

Chosen Names: A chosen name is a name that a person goes by that may or may not match their legal name. If you have a chosen name that is different from your legal name and would like that to be used in class, please let the instructor know. Below is a list of resources for updating your chosen name at UNT.

- [UNT Records](#)
- [UNT ID Card](#)

**UNT euids cannot be changed at this time. The collaborating offices are working on a process to make this option accessible to UNT community members.*

Additional Student Support Services

- Registrar (<https://registrar.unt.edu/registration>)
- [Financial Aid](https://financialaid.unt.edu/) (<https://financialaid.unt.edu/>)
- [Student Legal Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services>)
- [Career Center](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center>)
- [Multicultural Center](https://edo.unt.edu/multicultural-center) <https://edo.unt.edu/multicultural-center>)???

- [Counseling and Testing Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services) (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services)
- [UNT Food Pantry](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources/food-pantry) (https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources/food-pantry)

Academic Support Services:

- [Academic Resource Center](https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources) (https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources)
- [Academic Success Center](https://success.unt.edu/asc) (https://success.unt.edu/asc)
- [UNT Libraries](https://library.unt.edu/) (https://library.unt.edu/)
- [Writing Lab](http://writingcenter.unt.edu/) (http://writingcenter.unt.edu/)

Class Schedule and Topics

Schedule Changes: I reserve the right to change any of the exam times or assignments by providing you with at least 48-hour notice of such changes. You are responsible for any changes that may occur during the semester. Any changes will be announced at the beginning of each class and posted in Canvas.

Coming Attractions

Week 1	August 17, 19
	Chapter 1, Foundations
Week 2	August 24, 26
	Chapter 2, the Federal System
Week 3	August 31, September 2
	Chapter 3, State Systems
Week 4	September 7, 9 (NO Class on the 7th. Labor Day!)
	Chapter 4, Jurisdiction and Policymaking Boundaries

- Week 5 September 14, 16
Chapter 5, State Judges
- Week 6 September 21, 23
Chapter 6. Federal Judges
- Week 7 September 28, 30
Chapter 7, Policy Links
- Week 8 October 5, 7
More Chapter 7, Policy Links
MIDTERM EXAM on the 7th!
- Week 9 October 12, 14
Chapter 8, Lawyers, Litigants, and Interest Groups
- Week 10 October 19, 21
Chapter 10, Criminal trials
- Week 11 October 26, 28
Chapter 11, Civil procedure
- Week 12 November 2, 4
Chapter 12, Decision-making by Trial Court Judges
- Week 13 November 9, 11
Ch. 13, Decision-making in Collegial courts

Week 14: November 16, 18

Chapter 14, Implementation and Impact of Judicial Policies.

Week 15 November 23 - 27

Fall Break, no class

Week 16 November 30, December 2 (Journals are due on the 2nd at 11:10 at 11:10 am!)

Chapter 15, Policymaking: a Synthesis

Week 17 FINAL EXAM on Saturday, December 5th, 10:30 am – 12:30 pm, WH 121