

PSCI 3210: U.S. Supreme Court

Fall, 2026

Monday & Wednesday, 9:35 - 10:55 AM
Gate 137

Instructor: Dr. Yu-hsien Sung (she/her/hers)
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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 11:30 - 1:00 P.M.

Course Description and Objectives

The United States Supreme Court plays an important role in American democracy. As the highest court in the federal judiciary, its decisions do more than resolve disputes between litigants; they announce important public policies that govern relationships among citizens and governments. The Supreme Court plays an important role in determining the scope of freedoms enjoyed in the United States and its decisions frequently alter the balance of power between political actors and institutions, including citizens, the president, Congress, the states, and the Court itself.

In this course, we will explore the Supreme Court as a political and policymaking institution. We will consider the processes by which cases are decided and the factors that influence Supreme Court justices' decisions. We will also consider the relationships between the Supreme Court and other actors, including the elected branches of government, interest groups, and the public.

Required Materials

- Lawrence Baum. 2019. *The Supreme Court*, 13th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press. ISBN: 9781544327389
- Assigned articles are available electronically on Canvas

Course Format

This is an in-person, upper-level course. I expect students to come to class prepared and actively participate in class discussions and activities. Each week, you will complete the following tasks:

1. Read the assigned book chapters and articles.
2. Consolidate, synthesize, and revise your notes on the assigned materials.
3. Attend class, review your notes before class, and be prepared for quizzes on the assigned readings during each class session.

Canvas

This course has a Canvas site accessible at <https://canvas.unt.edu>. The site includes administrative details, assignments, and student grades. I encourage you to check it regularly.

Course Expectation

To be successful in this class, you must complete the assigned readings and coursework on time. As the instructor, I am responsible for providing clear, well-structured course materials to help you meet the learning objectives. As a student, you are responsible for completing the assigned readings and assignments.

Office Hours

I will hold office hours on Monday and Wednesday from 11:30 - 1:00 PM. **Please sign up for office hours in advance using the Calendly link:** <https://calendly.com/yhsien-sung/20min>

If you are unable to attend office hours or need additional time to talk, please email me, and we can arrange an alternate time. I am also available by email and am happy to answer any questions electronically. I will make every effort to respond to emails during weekdays.

Please note that we will *not* discuss grades over email. This policy is in accordance with federal laws protecting student information. You should regularly check your grades on the Canvas course site. If you need to discuss your grade, please schedule a meeting with me.

Changes to the Syllabus

I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus as needed throughout the semester. Any adjustments to course requirements will be announced in class and on Canvas with at least 48 hours' notice. It is your responsibility to stay informed of any updates during the semester.

Assignments & Grading Policy

Grades will be weighted in the following way:

- **5% Attendance**
 - 5% of your grade is determined by attendance. An attendance sheet will be circulated each day. Each student is allowed three (3) unexcused absences without penalty to their grade. However, things happen —illness, serious family emergency, participation in official university-sponsored events or competitions, religious holidays, etc. If this occurs, please contact me as soon as possible.
- **20% In-Class Assignments and Quizzes**
 - 20% of your grade is determined by completion and success on in-class assignments and quizzes. Throughout the semester, there will be group and individual in-class assignments for completion points, as well as a series of short pop quizzes from that week's reading material, each worth 10 points. In total, there will be 10 in-class assignments or pop quizzes and I will drop the two lowest grades (either incomplete, if you were absent, or the two numerically lowest grades). There are no make-ups if you are absent. If you show up to class, you will receive a minimum of 50% on the quiz or assignment.

- **20% Decision-Making Models Analysis & Peer Review**

- 18% Select one Supreme Court decision from the provided list and create a five-minute video or podcast-style analysis. Limit your case summary to 30 seconds and devote the remaining time to applying the legal, attitudinal, and strategic models. For each model, offer one testable explanation, provide at least one specific piece of evidence, and identify what the model cannot explain. Conclude by identifying the most persuasive model.
- 2% Review two classmates' submissions and provide constructive feedback on their analysis.

- **25% Exam 1**

- 25% of your grade is determined by exam 1 on Wednesday, October 7th. This exam will contain multiple choice, short answer, true-or-false, matching, and essay questions.

- **30% Exam 2**

- 30% of your grade is determined by exam 2 on Wednesday, December 2nd. This exam will contain multiple choice, short answer, true-or-false, matching, and essay questions.

Late Assignments

Assignments must be submitted on time. There are no make-ups for attendance or in-class quizzes. If you do not attend class, you will not receive attendance points for that class session.

As for exams, students must take all exams as scheduled. In the event of extenuating circumstances (e.g., a family emergency, hospitalization), students may be eligible for a short extension. All such requests must be processed through the Dean of Students' Office (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/dean-of-students/contact.html>). That office is responsible for verifying the nature of the circumstances and will communicate directly with me if accommodations are warranted. I do not grant extensions or make-up opportunities unless I receive official notification from the Dean of Students.

Grading Scale

The grading scale is as follows:

- A = 90 - 100
- B = 80 - 89.99
- C = 70 - 79.99
- D = 60 - 69.99
- F = 59 and below

UNT Policies

Artificial Intelligence and Academic Integrity

In this course, I want you to engage deeply with the materials and develop your own critical thinking and writing skills. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools, e.g., Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini, is not permitted. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete

any part of an assignment, exam, or coursework will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the Student Academic Integrity policy.

Additionally, tools like ChatGPT are not allowed as they blur authorship and misrepresent your independent work. All work must be your own.

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. <https://vpaa.unt.edu/ss/integrity>

Americans with Disabilities Act Statement

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 accommodations 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 at <http://disability.unt.edu/>.

Emergency Notification and 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 the UNT Learning Management System (LMS) for contingency plans for covering course materials.

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. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>.

Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, and Assault

The University has procedures in place that aim to be aware of the needs of those who make an institutional report of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Procedures include informing individuals about their right to file criminal charges as well as the availability of counseling, health, mental health, victim advocacy, legal assistance, visa and immigration assistance and other services on and/or off campus, as well as additional remedies to prevent contact between a complainant and a respondent, such as housing, academic, transportation and working

accommodations, if reasonably available. The University will make such accommodations, if the victim requests them and if they are reasonably available, regardless of whether the complainant chooses to report the crime to the UNTPD or local law enforcement.

Anyone can report prohibited conduct by notifying the Dean of Students Office (940.565.2648), the Title IX Coordinator (940.565.2759) or the UNT Police Department (940.565.3000). The online reporting form is found at <http://report.unt.edu>.

Semester-at-a-Glance

1. Introduction to the Supreme Court: Institutions, Histories, and Judicial Legitimacy
2. Supreme Court Policymaking: The Court as a Political Actor?
3. Supreme Court Processes
4. Supreme Court Decision-Making and the Factors That Shape It

Schedule¹

Students are expected to complete all assigned readings before each class meeting

Monday, August 17: Introduction

- Syllabus Day

Wednesday, August 19: Introduction to Political Science Research

- Green, Amelia Hoover, "How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps," available on Canvas.
- "Interpreting Statistical Tables in Political Science Articles"

Monday, August 24: Introduction to the U.S. Supreme Court

- Lawrence Baum. 2019. *The Supreme Court*, 13th ed., Chapter 1, "The Court," pp. 1–20.

Wednesday, August 26: Supreme Court & Legitimacy

- Lawrence Baum. 2019. *The Supreme Court*, 13th ed., Chapter 1, "The Court," pp. 20–25.
- Black, Ryan C., Ryan J. Owens, and Miles T. Armaly. "A well-traveled lot: A research note on judicial travel by US Supreme Court justices." *Justice System Journal* 37.4 (2016): 367-384.

Monday, August 31

- Gibson, James L., and Michael J. Nelson. "Is the US Supreme Court's legitimacy grounded in performance satisfaction and ideology?." *American Journal of Political Science* 59.1 (2015): 162-174.

Wednesday, September 2: No Class

Professor Sung attending the American Political Science Association Annual Conference

¹Tentative and subject to change.

Monday, September 7: Labor Day, No Classes**Wednesday, September 9**

- Driscoll, Amanda, and Michael J. Nelson. "The costs of court curbing: Evidence from the United States." *The Journal of Politics* 85.2 (2023): 609-624.

Monday, September 14: Policymaking

- Lawrence Baum. 2019. *The Supreme Court*, 13th edition. Thousand Oaks: CA: CQ Press. Chapter 6, "The Court's Impact"

Wednesday, September 16: Policymaking

- Lawrence Baum. 2019. *The Supreme Court*, 13th edition. Thousand Oaks: CA: CQ Press. Chapter 5, "Decision Making".

Monday, September 21: Policymaking

- Robert Dahl. 1957. "Decision-Making in a Democracy: The Supreme Court as a National Policymaker." *Journal of Public Law* 6: 279-295.

Wednesday, September 23: Courts & Social change

- Gerald N. Rosenberg. 2008. *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?* 2nd ed. University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1.

Monday, September 28: Courts & Social change

- Gerald N. Rosenberg. 2008. *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?* 2nd ed. University of Chicago Press. Chapter 6.

Wednesday, September 30: Judicial Preferences

- Journal Article I: Glynn, Adam N., and Maya Sen. "Identifying Judicial Empathy: Does Having Daughters Cause Judges to Rule for Women's Issues?." *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 1 (2015): 37-54.

Mon, October 5: Exam 1 Review

Wed, October 7: Exam 1

Monday, October 12: Supreme Court Processes

- Lawrence Baum. 2019. *The Supreme Court*, 13th edition. Thousand Oaks: CA: CQ Press. Chapter 3, "The Cases"

Wednesday, October 14

Lawrence Baum. 2019. *The Supreme Court*, 13th edition. Thousand Oaks: CA: CQ Press. Chapter 4, "Decision Making"

Monday, October 19: Decision Making Models

Segal, Jeffrey A., and Alan J. Champlin. "The attitudinal model." *Routledge Handbook of Judicial Behavior*. Routledge, 2017. 17-33.

Wednesday, October 21

Pickerill, Mitchell, and Christopher Brough. "Law and Politics in Judicial and Supreme Court Decision Making." *Routledge Handbook of Judicial Behavior*. Routledge, 2017.

Monday, October 26

Epstein, Lee, and Jack Knight. "Strategic Accounts of Judging." *Routledge Handbook of Judicial Behavior*. Routledge, 2017.

Wednesday, October 28: Agenda Setting

Baird, Vanessa A. "The Effect of Politically Salient Decisions on the U.S. Supreme Court's Agenda." *The Journal of Politics* 66, no. 3 (2004): 755-772.

Monday, November 2

Black, Ryan C., and Ryan J. Owens. "Agenda setting in the Supreme Court: The collision of policy and jurisprudence." *The Journal of Politics* 71.3 (2009): 1062-1075.

Wednesday, November 4

Black, Ryan C., and Christina L. Boyd. "Selecting the Select Few: The Discuss List and the US Supreme Court's Agenda-Setting Process." *Social Science Quarterly* 94.4 (2013): 1124-1144.

Monday, November 9: Interest Groups and Strategic Litigation

Scott, Jamil S., Elizabeth A. Lane, and Jessica A. Schoenherr. "You Better Shop Around: Litigant Characteristics and Supreme Court Support." *The Journal of Politics* 87.3 (2025): 1012-1027.

Wednesday, November 11: Staffing the Bench

Lawrence Baum. 2019. *The Supreme Court*, 13th edition. Thousand Oaks: CA: CQ Press. Chapter 2, "The Justices"

Monday, November 16

Cottrell, David, Charles R. Shipan, and Richard J. Anderson. "The power to appoint: Presidential Nominations and Change on the Supreme Court." *Journal of Politics* 81.3 (2019): 1057-1068.

Wednesday, November 18

Armaly, Miles T., Christopher N. Krewson, and Elizabeth A. Lane. "The influence of descriptive representation on support for judicial nominees and the US Supreme Court." *Political Behavior* 47.2 (2025): 661-687.

November 23-29: Thanksgiving Break, No Classes

Monday, November 30: Wrap-up, review

Wednesday, December 2: Exam 2

Monday, December 7: Decision-Making Models Analysis Due

Tuesday, December 8: Peer Review Due