

The U.S. Supreme Court

Introduction. Supreme Court and Constitutional Law scholar David O'Brien calls the United States Supreme Court a "Storm Center" because it is at the heart of many so controversies. Over the years, the U.S. Supreme Court has handed down controversial decisions involving same sex marriage, Obamacare, campaign finance, abortion, school prayer, the death penalty, affirmative action, homosexual sodomy, voting rights, and federalism. We've even looked to the Court to resolve matters relating to the war on terrorism, and in 2000, a U.S. Supreme Court decision decided a presidential election. As the highest court in the United States, the Supreme Court's decisions cannot be overruled, and they often have significant policy impacts. Compared to the other branches of the federal government, the Supreme Court almost always enjoys higher approval rating in public opinion polls, but at the same time, Americans know less about how the Court operates than they do Congress and the president. For all these reasons, the U.S. Supreme Court is an important and exciting subject of study in political science.

Course Requirements and Grades. We will cover one Module per week. Grades will be based on three exams, two papers and weekly participation on the Blackboard discussion forum. Detailed paper assignments will be posted on Blackboard. Late papers will not be accepted. Academic misconduct (e.g., plagiarism, copied work or cheating – it is your responsibility to learn/know what the university defines as academic misconduct) will result in an "F" for the course. You must also pass a Syllabus Quiz in the first week (Module 1) of the course.

- Participation on weekly online discussion forums (10 points each week, 150 points total)
- 3 Exams 50 points each (150 points total)
- Essay on Current Supreme Court Justice (100 points)
- Analytical paper on current Supreme Court case (100 points)

****All Students are also required to take a **syllabus quiz** by the end of **Week 1 (Saturday, Sept. 2, 11:59 PM)**. The quiz covers the content of this syllabus, and you must get at least 8 of 10 correct to pass. There are no points given for the quiz (**i.e. it does not count toward your course grade**), but you cannot receive credit for any exams, assignments or discussion without **passing it in Week 1**. The quiz will cover all information on this syllabus, and is designed to ensure that all students have read the syllabus and understand the coverage and requirements of the course.*

- **Grading Scale:** There are 500 possible total points in this class. Letter grades for the course will be based on the following grade scale:

A 461-500	B 415-439	C 350-389
A- 450-460	B- 400-414	D 300-349
B+ 440-449	C+ 390-399	F 299 and below

- **Essay on Current Supreme Court Justice**
 - You will write a 5-7 page essay on one of the current Supreme Court Justices (your choice). Your paper must describe the justice's personal and professional background prior to being appointed to the Court, the nomination and confirmation of the justice, and the justice's performance on the Court since being appointed. It is due at the end of **Week 4** of this course (**Saturday, Sept. 23, 11:59 PM**); and it is worth 100 points.
- **Analytical Paper**
 - You must write a 6-10 page analytical paper on a current case under consideration, but not decided yet, by the Supreme Court. In this paper, you will choose a case currently under consideration before the Court. You will read the legal briefs filed by the attorneys and third parties, and analyze how the case was selected by the Court as well as how you think the justices will vote in the case. The paper is due by the end of **Week 14 (Saturday, Dec. 2, 11:59 PM)**; and it is worth 100 points.
- **Discussion**
 - You are required to participate in a discussion forum for each module. The forum will begin with a number of related questions. The questions will be designed to get you to think critically about the course materials for that Module. However, they are intended to be the starting point for a discussion among all the students in the class. It will not be sufficient to simply post a list of answers to the questions involved. You are expected to respond to and engage with the other students in the class. You will be graded on how relevant your posts are to the topic, how well you use the course materials in your discussion, how well you engage with other students and my overall assessment of the quality of your analysis and arguments. All discussion for each module must take place during the week the Module is assigned, and posts after the end of the week will not be graded. You are expected to post your first comments by Tuesday (11:59 PM) each week, and to respond to students with additional posts on an ongoing basis after your initial post. There is not a magic number of posts in order to receive full credit, and regardless of how many posts you may make, you will only receive credit if your posts are relevant to the topic and questions for that week and make use of course materials (readings and presentations) in your comments. You can receive a 10/10 for two or three in depth and thoughtful posts, but you could also receive a 6/10 for 5 posts that are not substantive or relevant. Note that this is intended to take the place of an in-class discussion for a face-to-face class. Our discussion forum is NOT Twitter or another social media site, and thus you are not limited (nor should you limit yourself) to 140 characters, and "likes" or "favorites" do not count as discussion (e.g., avoid responding to another student with "I really like your post"). Discussion for each module is worth 10 points. There will be a discussion forum for each of the first 15 Modules, so there will be 150 possible points for discussion (Module 16 is during finals week and will not include any discussion so that you can prepare for and complete Exam #4).
- **Examinations**
 - There will be three examinations. The exams will not be cumulative, and they will cover the material from readings, presentations and discussion. Each exam consists of 20 multiple choice questions and 5 Identifications, each worth 2 points. You will have 1 hour to complete the exam. Each exam is worth 50 points (so the three exams will total 150 points).
 - Exam 1 will be taken at the end of Module 5 (**deadline: Saturday, Sept. 30, 11:59 PM**)
 - Exam 2 will be taken at the end of Module 8 (**deadline: Saturday, October 21, 11:59 PM**)
 - Exam 3 will be taken during Finals Week in Module 16 (**deadline: Thursday, Dec. 7, 11:59 PM**) *****note that you cannot wait until Saturday to finish the last exam*****

Completing Modules. Each week, a new Module will open at the beginning of the day on that Sunday. All requirements for that week's Module **must be completed by the following Saturday by 11:59 PM.** Note that Exam #3 in Module 16 must be finished by Thursday at 11:59 of that week, in order to allow adequate time to compute and submit final grades.

Presentations and Reading Assignments. Presentations for each topic will be posted on Blackboard each week. Most of our assigned readings come from Lawrence Baum's *The Supreme Court* (12th Edition, 2016) Additional readings will be made available on Blackboard (denoted on the syllabus by "BB"). You are also expected to keep current with national, state and regional news related to the class. Important legal issues and court cases arise regularly, and we will incorporate relevant legal news into our discussions.

All writing assignments will be graded on the quality of both substance and writing, including organization, grammar and style. You should have a writing resource readily available and consult it regularly. There are a variety of such resources, such as the Chicago Manual of Style and Strunk & White's The Elements of Style, and I strongly recommend you make use of these writing aids, as well at the NIU Writing Center.

Course Outline

<u>Module/Week</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings</u>
A. Introduction and Overview		
1 (Aug. 26-Sept. 2)	Overview of the Course & Methods of Studying The Supreme Court	Miller, pp. 3-6 (BB)
Module 1: Syllabus Quiz		
2 (Sept. 3-9)	History and Organization of the Court	Baum, Ch. 1 O'Brien Ch. 3 (BB)
B. The Justices		
3 (Sep. 10-16)	Appointment and Confirmation of the Justices	Baum Ch. 2
4 (Sep. 17-23)	Current Justices and the Politics of the Modern Appointment Process	Georgetown Law School website (Link on BB)
Module 4: Essay on Current Justice Due		
5 (Sep. 24-30)	The Chief Justice: Roles and Responsibilities	Baum Ch. 4 pp. 132-136
Module 5: Exam #1		

C. The Cases

6 (Oct 1-7)	Getting a Case to Court: Agenda Setting	Baum Ch. 3 McGuire, Ch 3 (BB)
7 (Oct. 8-14)	Supreme Court Decision-Making: The Formal Process	Baum Ch 4, pp. 104-113
8 (Oct. 15-21)	Influences on Decision Making	Baum Ch 4, pp. 113-144

Module 8: Exam #2

D. Policy Outputs and Judicial Impact

9 (Oct. 22-28)	Activism and Changes in the Court's Agenda	Baum, Ch. 5, pp.152-166
10 (Oct. 29-Nov. 4)	The Content of Policy Concurrences and Dissents	Baum, Ch. 5, pp. 166-180
11 (Nov. 5-11)	Reading and Dissecting Court Opinions	Court Opinion excerpts (BB)
12 (Nov. 12-18)	The Court's Impact	Baum, Ch. 6 183-185 Rosenberg chapters
13 (Nov. 19-25)	Stare Decisis and Overruling Precedent	Court Opinion excerpts (BB)
14 (Nov. 26-Dec. 2)	Implementation of Judicial Policies	Baum Ch. 6, 185-219

Module 14: Analytical Paper on Current Supreme Court Case Due

15 (Dec. 3-9)	Political Responses to Court Decisions	Pickerill (BB)
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Module 16: Exam #3 (Final Exam Week – Due by Thursday, December 7 11:59 PM

Other Items and Policies:

Undergraduate Writing Awards

The Department of Political Science recognizes, on an annual basis, outstanding undergraduate papers written in conjunction with 300-400 level political science courses or directed studies, such as independent studies or honors theses. Winners are expected to attend the Department's spring graduation ceremony where they will receive a certificate and a check for \$100.00. No more than two papers may be submitted by a student. There is no requirement as to the length of papers submitted for the award. Often the Department awards prizes for both an outstanding short paper and an outstanding long paper. The number and types of award is dependent upon the papers submitted for consideration in any given year. Authors do not have to be political science majors or have a particular class standing. Only papers written in the previous calendar year are considered for the award. However, papers completed in the current spring semester are eligible for the following year's competition even if the student has graduated. Papers can be submitted by students or faculty and must be supplied in triplicate to the undergraduate secretary. All copies must have two cover pages – one with the student's name and one without the student's name. Papers are not to be stapled or bound. Instead, please use paper clips. Papers are generally due in March and notice of call for papers and submission deadlines will be published in the department e-announcements. You may also contact the department for information at 753-1015.

Department of Political Science Web Site

Undergraduates are strongly encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science website on a regular basis. This up-to-date, central source of information will assist students in contacting faculty and staff, reviewing course requirements and syllabi, exploring graduate study, researching career options, tracking department events, and accessing important details related to undergraduate programs and activities. To reach the site, go to <http://polisci.niu.edu>.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

A student who believes that reasonable accommodations with respect to course work or other academic requirements may be appropriate in consideration of a disability must (1) provide the required verification of the disability to the Center for Access-Ability Resources, (2) meet with the Center for Access-Ability Resources to determine appropriate accommodations, and (3) inform the faculty in charge of the academic activity of the need for accommodation. Students are encouraged to inform the faculty of their requests for accommodations as early as possible in the semester, but must make the requests in a timely enough manner for accommodations to be appropriately considered and reviewed by the university. If contacted by the faculty member, the staff of the Center for Access-Ability Resources will provide advice about accommodations that may be indicated in the particular case. Students who make requests for reasonable accommodations are expected to follow the policies and procedures of the Center for Access-Ability Resources in this process, including but not limited to the Student Handbook. A wide range of services can be obtained by students with disabilities, including housing, transportation, adaptation of printed materials, and advocacy with faculty and staff. Students with disabilities who need such services or want more information should contact the Center for Access-Ability Resources at 815-753-1303.