

**POLS 8430: JUDICIAL POLITICS**  
**Three Credits**  
**Face-to-Face Instruction**

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION AND ACCESSIBILITY**

Instructor: Dr. Jessica A. Schoenherr, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science

- Email: [jaschoenherr@uga.edu](mailto:jaschoenherr@uga.edu)
- Office: 303C Baldwin Hall
- Office Hours: Wednesday afternoons, by appointment

Email is the best way to contact me. You must include "POLS 8430" in the subject line or you will not get a response. Please allow 24 hours for a response during the week and 48 hours for a response over the weekend.

**UNIVERSITY COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Judicial processes, policy-making, and policies, with emphasis on judicial selection, models of judicial decision-making, institutional constraints on judicial choice, and the implementation and impact of judicial decisions.

**ADDITIONAL COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is designed to be an introduction to the academic literature on American courts and judicial politics. The primary focus will be on the U.S. Supreme Court, though we will discuss lower federal courts as well. We will be reading and critiquing contemporary scholarly works published in this area in order to build up your understanding of the judiciary and prepare you to teach and conduct research in this area. Additionally, this course will help you develop and practice a number of professional skills that are important to your success in the discipline

**PRE-REQUISITES**

There are no pre-requisites for this class.

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of this course, you should:

1. Develop a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental theories related to judicial behavior and decision making.
2. Develop critical thinking skills necessary to adapt theoretical arguments to different institutional and environmental contexts.
3. Learn how to respond to research in a constructive manner, including learning how to offer constructive criticism on people's work (peer review) and respectfully build on existing arguments to push the discipline forward (doing independent research).
4. Demonstrate the capacity to design and lead a class on a topic in judicial politics.
5. Know how to put together a research proposal and request for funding.

6. Enhance your written communication skills, specifically your ability to produce and present high-quality written research.

## TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR COURSE

Readings, assignment instructions, and all assignment submission boxes are located on the eLC site for this course. Please ensure you have access to eLC at the beginning of the semester. You can look for help with eLC [here](#), or reach out to eLC for help [here](#).

To participate in learning activities and complete assignments, you will need:

- Access to a working computer that has a current operating system with updates installed
- Reliable internet access and a UGA email account
- A current internet browser that is compatible with eLC
- Microsoft Word as your word processing program
- Reliable data storage for your work, such as a USB drive or Office365 OneDrive cloud storage

Lectures and course materials (which are inclusive of my presentations, tests, exams, outlines, and lecture notes) are my production. You are encouraged to take notes and utilize course materials for your own educational purpose. However, you are not to reproduce or distribute this content without my expressed written permission.

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS

Your grade will be determined using the following grading scheme:

| Area                                 | Weight      |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| Five-Point Memos                     | 20%         |
| Seminar Participation/Seminar Leader | 20%         |
| Article Presentation                 | 10%         |
| Funding Proposal                     | 15%         |
| Article Review                       | 10%         |
| Replication and Extension Paper      | 25%         |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>100%</b> |

### **FIVE-POINT MEMOS (20%):**

Knowing how to synthesize articles and books into small pieces that you can fit into a lit review is a learned skill that takes practice. To that end, **you will complete a one-page "Five-Point Memo" for each assigned reading.** In that page, you will provide the following information:

1. A one-sentence summary of the article.
2. A one-paragraph explanation of where this piece fits in the literature.
3. An explanation of the methodological approach:
  - a. Dependent variable used
  - b. Independent variable used
  - c. Hypotheses

- d. Underlying approach (observational, experimental, archival, etc.)
- e. Method and model
- 4. A one-paragraph discussion of what the authors found
- 5. One way to build on the research moving forward (which can include a criticism of the piece, but if you do that, you also have to offer a way to fix the issue)

Please note: While I encourage you all to talk about the readings outside of class, these memos need to be your own work. Do not turn in the same memo that somebody else is turning in.

### **SEMINAR PARTICIPATION/SEMINAR LEADER (20%):**

I expect that you will regularly attend our seminar meetings, be prepared for each session, and participate in any activities or exercises during the seminar. By prepared, I do not just mean completing the readings, but also showing you have thought about them and how they advance the judicial politics literature on the whole. You are expected to offer thoughts and opinions in the class without prompting. Your goal is to show me and your classmates that you put in the work for every class.

Additionally, for one week out of the semester, you will lead the class! You will decide how to break up the time as well as the activities your classmates will engage in, and you will be the Subject Matter Expert on that topic for the week. Your classmates will submit their Five-Point Memos to you and you will help them understand the material. Congratulations!

Following your seminar leadership, you will email me ***a one-page self-assessment of the experience***, including your thoughts on what you learned while leading the class, what you thought you did well, and what you think you can do better in the future. ***This memo is due by 5 PM the day after you lead the seminar.*** I will respond with a similar memo and commentary. Teaching is hard. Practice and feedback make it easier.

### **ARTICLE PRESENTATION (10%):**

As political scientists, we spend an inordinate amount of time presenting our work to others via presentations. As graduate students, these presentations are crucial for building your representation within the discipline. You have to bring your A-game to a conference presentation, so we are going to start building your presentation skills in this class.

At some point this semester, you will present one of the articles we read that week. You will act like it is your own paper and you will present it as such. You will put together a slide deck, keep to standard presentation time (10 minutes), and you will have to do a five-minute Q&A afterward. You will be graded on: (1) your overall presentation; (2) correctness of presentation; (3) ability to answer questions during the Q&A.

### **FUNDING PROPOSAL (15%):**

A not-insignificant part of any job is putting together short (under five pages) funding proposals for projects. This means (1) figuring out how many hours a project will take; (2) figuring out the equipment you need to complete the project and its cost; (3) identifying how much you can complete on your own; (4) deciding how much research assistance you will need and its cost; and

(5) getting people who know nothing about your research to understand what you are working on, why it is important, and why they should give you money to do it. You will be putting together a short research proposal for a project of your choosing.

### **ARTICLE REVIEW (10%):**

Part of our job as academics is engaging in the peer review process. You will be sending your research out into the world and asking other academics to review it, provide feedback, and eventually suggest the project is worthy of publication. You will also be the person providing the feedback. Even if a paper gets rejected (which is the modal outcome in this discipline), you still hope the feedback is constructive and useful. As you will all see, this is not always the case! Giving solid feedback on pieces is difficult and learning how to do so in a constructive manner is even harder. You will get a chance to practice this in our class by writing a review of one of the week's pieces.

### **REPLICATION AND EXTENSION PAPER (25%):**

Doing research is hard. One way to build your research skills is to work through somebody else's theory and data analysis and then, using a combination of theory and your own data skills, try to extend their findings.

To that end, throughout the semester, you will be working on a replication and extension paper (8-10 pages including graphs and tables) in which you replicate an existing judicial politics piece and then extend it to either a new question, or answer the paper's question differently.

To make this task manageable, you will work on it in three parts. When you complete each of these tasks, you must submit the information to the appropriate dropbox on eLC.

- 1. Select an article to replicate and extend**
  - a. Whatever article you pick, make sure it has the data and code stored on the researcher's website or on the ICPSR servers or the Harvard Dataverse
  - b. You can pick an article that we read in class, but you cannot pick one of *my* articles
- 2. Provide an outline of the theory behind the original article, a well-reasoned explanation for your extension, and an initial data analysis**
- 3. Provide a final paper (8-10 pages, double spaced, including graphs + tables) that explains the original paper, shows you can replicate the original analysis, and then shows and explains your extension**
  - a. You will also turn in your Stata .do file or your .R script to me for review

## GRADING SCALE

I will use the following scale to assign course grades:

| Percentage  | Grade |
|-------------|-------|
| 93-100%     | A     |
| 90-92%      | A-    |
| 87-89%      | B+    |
| 83-86%      | B     |
| 80-82%      | B-    |
| 77-79%      | C+    |
| 73-76%      | C     |
| 70-72%      | C-    |
| 67-69%      | D+    |
| 63-66%      | D     |
| 60-62%      | D-    |
| 59 or less% | F     |

Percentages greater than or equal to 0.5 will be rounded up to the next highest whole percentage (example: 86.5% will round up to an 87%).

## STATEMENTS ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

"I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others." *A Culture of Honesty*, the University's procedures for handling cases of suspected dishonesty, can be found at [honesty.uga.edu](http://honesty.uga.edu).

According to UGA, "academic dishonesty" means cheating, attempting to cheat, or assisting someone else in cheating, even if unintentional. Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to:

1. Plagiarism – using another's work as your own without correct citations
2. Unauthorized assistance – giving or receiving help for assignments without prior approval from your instructor
3. Lying/tampering – giving false information related to academic work or in connection with a facilitated discussion, continued discussion, meeting with multiple violations review board, or appeal
4. Theft – stealing any information related to academic work

Absolutely no form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated. Anyone found guilty of cheating, plagiarism, or any other violation of academic integrity will receive an automatic grade of 0.0 for the assignment. Additionally, all other penalties within the University will be pursued to the fullest extent.

For more information about academic dishonesty and UGA's policy regarding them, see UGA's [Academic Honesty Policy](#). It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with these policies.

## USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

Students may not use artificial intelligence programs (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude) to complete assignments in this class. Using these programs is a form of unauthorized assistance under the UGA Honor Code. Anyone found guilty of using it will receive an automatic grade of 0.0 for the assignment. Additionally, all other penalties within the University will be pursued to the fullest extent.

## ACCOMMODATIONS FOR DISABILITIES

If you plan to request accommodations for a disability, please register with the Accessibility and Testing Center. They can be reached by visiting Clark Howell Hall, calling 706-542-8719 (voice) or 706-542-8778 (TTY), or by visiting [accessibility.uga.edu](https://accessibility.uga.edu).

## UGA WELL-BEING RESOURCES

UGA Well-Being Resources promote student success by cultivating a culture that supports a more active, healthy, and engaged student community.

Anyone needing assistance is encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach (SCO) in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-8479 or visit [sco.uga.edu](https://sco.uga.edu). Student Care and Outreach helps students navigate difficult circumstances by connecting them with the most appropriate resources or services. They also administer the [Embark@UGA](https://embark@uga.edu) program, which supports students experiencing, or who have experienced, homelessness, foster care, or housing insecurity.

UGA provides both clinical and non-clinical options to support student well-being and mental health, any time, any place. Whether on campus or studying from home or abroad. UGA Well-being Resources are here to help.

- Well-Being Resources: [well-being.uga.edu](https://well-being.uga.edu)
- Student Care and Outreach: [sco.uga.edu](https://sco.uga.edu)
- University Health Center: [healthcenter.uga.edu](https://healthcenter.uga.edu)
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services: [caps.uga.edu](https://caps.uga.edu) or CAPS 24/7 crisis support at 706-542-2273
- Health Promotion/Fontaine Center: [healthpromotion.uga.edu](https://healthpromotion.uga.edu)
- Accessibility and Testing: [accessibility.uga.edu](https://accessibility.uga.edu)

Additional information, including free digital well-being resources, can be accessed through the UGA app or by visiting <https://well-being.uga.edu>.

## A NOTE REGARDING COURSE DESIGN

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

All changes will be noted on eLC and sent to students via email in advance of class.

## TOPIC OUTLINE FOR THE COURSE

Week 1 – Introduction

Week 2 – How do Political Scientists Think About the Supreme Court?

Week 3 – Supreme Court Nominations and Confirmations

Week 4 – Agenda Setting and Clerks

Week 5 – Briefs, Attorneys, and the Solicitor General

Week 6 – Oral Argument

Week 7 – The Process of Opinion Writing

Week 8 – Judges and their Decisions

Week 9 – No class, Spring Break

Week 10 – Separation of Powers

Week 11 – The Judiciary and the Public

Week 12 – Judicial Legitimacy

Week 13 – Interest Groups and the Media

Week 14 – A (Far Too Brief) Foray into Lower Federal Courts

Week 15 – Working week