

POLS 4760: SUPREME COURT POLITICS
Fall 2025
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:35 AM to 12:55 PM
301 Baldwin Hall
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
- Office: 303C Baldwin Hall
- Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1 PM to 3 PM, or by appointment

Email is the best way to contact me. You must include "POLS 4760" 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

An introduction to the United States Supreme Court as a powerful political institution and its justices as political actors. Major topics include Court history, agenda setting, judicial selection, judicial decision making, lawyers, interest groups, law clerks, oral arguments, and opinion assignment and writing.

ADDITIONAL COURSE DESCRIPTION

In *Federalist 78*, Alexander Hamilton famously called the judiciary "the weakest of the three departments of power" because it "has no influence over the sword or the purse; no direction either of the strength or of the wealth of the society; and it can take no active resolution whatever." Yet in modern times, the Supreme Court is a major political player. People care about who gets put on the Court, who leaves the Court, who writes the opinions, and what those opinions say. The Supreme Court is not just a legal decision-maker, but a political one as well.

This class will revolve around American federal judicial processes, particularly those of the United States Supreme Court, and how those processes are influenced by and influence politics and policy. Throughout the semester, we will discuss questions relevant to the judiciary, including:

- How do justices get on the Court? When and why do justices retire? How do presidents decide who to nominate for an open Court seat, and how does the confirmation process work?
- How does a case make it to the Supreme Court?
- How do justices decide a case? Why does one justice write the opinion and not another?
- How does the Court interact with other institutions?
- How does the public respond to the Court's work?

PRE-REQUISITES

POLS 1101 or POLS 1101E or POLS 1101H or POLS 1101S

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, you should:

- Develop a substantive understanding of the historical development of the federal judiciary.
- Understand the factors that influence Supreme Court decision making, from legal to political to strategic to personal.
- Identify how justices bargain and negotiate with one another over case outcomes, opinion writing assignments, and opinion content.
- Improve your ability to read, interpret, and apply peer-reviewed social scientific research.

COURSE MATERIALS

Please obtain a copy of one of the following books:

- Kaplan, David A. 2019. *The Most Dangerous Branch: Inside the Supreme Court in the Age of Trump*. New York: Crown.
 - Physical edition: 978-1524759919
- Woodward, Bob, and Scott Armstrong. 1979. *The Brethren: Inside the Supreme Court*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
 - Physical edition: 978-0-7432-7402-9

Either a physical, digital, or audio copy of the book is fine.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR COURSE

Lecture slides, links to readings not in the textbook, exams, and assignment instructions 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 weights:

Area	Weight
Course Pre- and Post-Tests	10%
Participation and Attendance	15%
Quizzes	35%
Written Assignments	30%
Final Exam	10%
Total	100%

COURSE PRE- AND POST-TESTS (10%):

At the beginning of the semester, you will be asked to complete a multiple-choice test that will ask you about your knowledge of the American criminal justice system, as well as your comfort levels with different topics and types of coursework. You will take the same test again at the end of the semester. These tests will establish your baseline knowledge of the course material and show how much you learned/retained by the end of the semester.

These tests will be graded for completion and good-faith effort only, so you will get full credit as long as you complete the tests and it looks like you thought about the questions and your answers.

The Course Pre-Test will be available on eLC starting ***at 3 PM on Tuesday, August 18th and must be completed by 9 AM on Thursday, August 20th.***

The Course Post-Test will be available on eLC starting ***at 3 PM on Tuesday, November 17th and must be completed by 9 AM on Thursday, November 19th.***

PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE (15%):

Coming to class is important. This material is difficult to learn on your own and class time provides an opportunity to ask questions and engage with the material. It also gives me an opportunity to see how well you are picking up on the material and processing it.

To encourage engagement in the active learning process, I require that you come to class. I will pass around a sign-in sheet during each class, and you will sign next to your name to confirm you are in class. It is your responsibility to sign in, and if you fail to do so, you will receive a "0" for participation for that day.

Receiving participation and attendance points is entirely contingent on you actually being in class for the entire class period. If you come in after the sign-in sheet goes around and I notice, you will receive a "0" for participation that day. If you leave early and I notice, you will also receive a "0" for participation that day. If you walk in the door at the end of class, sign the sheet, and did not actually attend class, you will also receive a "0" for participation that day.

I will drop your five lowest participation scores. That means you can miss five classes before you get penalized for lack of participation. If you miss a book club meeting day (see below), that absence will not be dropped.

These absences include absences for feeling unwell but not sick enough to go to the doctor, missing class for pre-scheduled doctor's appointments, classes missed because of work/volunteering/interviews/activities/graduate school visits, leaving campus early for break or vacation, missing class because you could not find parking or your ride was late or your roommate took your shower slot (though I sympathize), as well as the days where you simply do not want to go to class. You do not need to email me when you use one of these absences. Absolutely do not email me asking to be "excused" for any of these reasons. Life happens, and this is why you have so many absences. It is your responsibility to use these absences in an appropriate matter.

Exceptions to these parameters will be made only in extreme circumstances, including (1) performance of military duty; (2) legal obligations to appear or participant in a judicial or administrative proceeding, including jury duty; (3) any medical condition related to pregnancy or childbirth; (4) a disability, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and as documented by the student with the Accessibility and Testing Office, which prevents the student from attending class; (5) observance of a religious practice, holiday, or holy day; (6) participation in an authorized University activity; (7) illness or injury that is too severe or contagious for the student to attend class; (8) death or severe illness of an immediate/dependent family member; (9) university closure for weather-related or other emergencies. In the event you miss class for one of these reasons, you must contact me in writing as soon as possible and provide documentation of your absence, at which time I will excuse you from participation for that day.

QUIZZES (35%):

Over the course of the class, you will be taking four quizzes, one for each unit. Each quiz will have between 10 and 15 multiple choice questions and 2-3 short answer questions. Quizzes will not be cumulative. The first quiz will cover the material from the first three substantive weeks of class. Each subsequent quiz will cover the material examined since the last quiz, meaning each quiz will cover approximately two weeks' worth of material. Everything that we talk about in class and everything covered in your readings is fair game for these quizzes.

Quizzes will always be given **IN CLASS ON THE DAYS MARKED IN THE SYLLABUS**. They will be done on paper (make sure you bring a physical writing instrument those days). You will be allowed to bring one page of notes into the quiz with you (front and back), but yo

Because life happens, I will drop your lowest quiz score. This means your final quiz grade will be your best three of four quizzes. This also means you can miss one quiz without penalty.

Quizzes will be open-note and open-book, but you can only bring physical copies of books and notes to class on quiz days. You will not be allowed to use your phone, iPad or tablet, laptop, or any other digital device during your quiz. Plan accordingly.¹

Because we will be taking these quizzes frequently, you will not be allowed to make up quizzes unless you meet one of the extreme exceptions listed below. Make up quizzes will be completed at my convenience, and I reserve the right to give you an alternative exam if you have to take a quiz at a different time.

Because we will be taking these quizzes frequently, absolutely no late quiz submissions will be accepted and no extensions will be given. Exceptions will be made only in extreme circumstances, including (1) performance of military duty; (2) legal obligations to appear or participant in a judicial or administrative proceeding, including jury duty; (3) any medical condition related to pregnancy or childbirth; (4) a disability, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and as documented by the student with the Accessibility and Testing Office, which prevents the student from attending class; (5) observance of a religious practice, holiday, or holy day; (6) participation in an authorized University activity; (7) illness or injury that is too severe or contagious for the student to attend class; (8) death or severe illness of an immediate/dependent family member; (9) university closure for weather-related or other emergencies.

If you miss a quiz for one of these reasons, you must contact me in writing before the quiz is due and provide documentation of your absence to make alternative arrangements. Failure to follow these guidelines will result in a grade of "0" being awarded for that quiz.

BOOK CLUB (30%):

In academic and professional settings alike, you will often be asked to engage critically with research as part of a group; to translate complex arguments for others; and to draw connections across different bodies of work. You are going to work on these skills in this class via our book club project.

Throughout the semester, you will be reading one of two different books about the Supreme Court:

- Kaplan, David A. 2019. *The Most Dangerous Branch: Inside the Supreme Court in the Age of Trump*. New York: Crown.
- Woodward, Bob, and Scott Armstrong. 1979. *The Brethren: Inside the Supreme Court*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

You pick the book you want to read; I will ask you to confirm your choice on the Course Pre-Test.

After reading the book, you will talk about this book during in-class sessions in two different capacities:

¹ If you have accommodations through the Accessibility and Testing Office, we will work through the accommodations together to ensure you have the testing environment you need. Consequently, these provisions will change when necessary (and will be confirmed in writing via email after receipt of the email from A&T outlining accommodations).

- Lesson Plan: You will meet with a small group of classmates who also read this book, and the group of you will create a lesson plan outlining how you would talk about this book in a criminal justice class (Tuesday, 10/6)
- Teaching and Learning: You will meet with students who read the other book, and you will (1) teach them about your book and (2) complete a worksheet about *their* book based on what they taught you (Thursday, 11/17).

You will be graded based on three different components:

- Quality of the shared lesson plan (10% of final grade)
- Quality of the briefing you give the other students in your group when you teach each other (10% of final grade)
- Quality of the worksheet you complete based on the other groups' explanation (10% of final grade)

Attendance in class on Book Club Days is mandatory because this work cannot be made up. If you miss class, your participation grade will take a hit -- you cannot use one of your participation dropped grades for a Book Club Day.

You will be completing the shared lesson plan and final worksheet on paper and turning them in at the end of class. Please note that if I see you using ANY generative AI systems in class while working on these assignments (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude), you will fail that assignment.

Exceptions to this no-miss policy will be made only in extreme circumstances, including (1) performance of military duty; (2) legal obligations to appear or participant in a judicial or administrative proceeding, including jury duty; (3) any medical condition related to pregnancy or childbirth; (4) a disability, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and as documented by the student with the Accessibility and Testing Office, which prevents the student from attending class; (5) observance of a religious practice, holiday, or holy day; (6) participation in an authorized University activity; (7) illness or injury that is too severe or contagious for the student to attend class; (8) death or severe illness of an immediate/dependent family member; (9) university closure for weather-related or other emergencies.

If you miss Book Club Day for one of these reasons, I will provide you with an alternative assignment that you will have to complete to make up the points. This option is **ONLY** available to students who meet one of the above exception criteria.

I will provide more details about each of these assignments, including grading rubrics, in separate documents that will be posted on eLC throughout the semester.

FINAL EXAM (10%):

To evaluate all that you learned throughout the semester, there will be a final exam for this class. This final will be cumulative and will consist of a combination of multiple choice, true or false, and essay questions. The format will look similar to your quizzes, but with more questions.

The final for this class is on Tuesday, December 8th at 12 PM. Unlike your regular quizzes, however, it will be conducted on eLC. I will provide more details as we get closer to the end of the semester.

All exams must be taken during the period in which they are scheduled. Exceptions will be made only in extreme circumstances, including (1) performance of military duty; (2) legal obligations to appear or participant in a judicial or administrative proceeding, including jury duty; (3) any medical condition related to pregnancy or childbirth; (4) a disability, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and as documented by the student with the Accessibility and Testing Office, which prevents the student from attending class; (5) observance of a religious practice, holiday, or holy day; (6) participation in an authorized University activity; (7) illness or injury that is too severe or contagious for the student to attend class; (8) death or severe illness of an immediate/dependent family member; (9) university closure for weather-related or other emergencies.

You must provide documentation that allows me to verify your absence is valid. All claims must, when possible, be made at least two weeks prior to when the exam is scheduled. Failure to follow these guidelines will result in a "0" being award for the final. I reserve the right to have the makeup exam be a different format than the exam that is given during the exam period.

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%).

GRADE APPEALS

If you receive a grade and see that it contains an arithmetic error (i.e., I mis-calculated your grade), please inform me of the problem as soon as you see it. If you have a question or concern about your performance on any course work, please email me and I will be happy to discuss why you got the grade that you did and how you can do better moving forward.

If you believe you were graded improperly or unfairly and want to appeal your grade, you may do so, but only if you abide by the following process:

- You must wait until at least 24 hours after you receive your grade to file an appeal.
- You must file your appeal within one week of the grade being released.
- Your appeal MUST be done in writing and emailed to me.
 - DO NOT try to talk to me about it after class or during office hours, or you will forfeit your ability to appeal.
- Your written appeal should explain, with evidence, why you believe your grade should be altered. It should do so concisely and without emotion.

If you follow these guidelines, I will evaluate your appeal and administer a decision within twenty-four hours. Please note that I reserve the right to move your grade up or down based on your appeal. Failure to follow these guidelines will result in an inability to appeal.

All concerns, arithmetic or otherwise, must be raised within one week of the release of that assignment/quiz's grade. It is your responsibility to pay attention to grade releases; the one-week clock starts when I release the grade in the eLC gradebook. Failure to act in that time period results in you forfeiting your ability to appeal your grade.

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.

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

To ensure you develop and master the foundational knowledge and skills in this course, the use of generative AI (GAI) tools is strictly prohibited. This includes all stages of your work process, even the preliminary ones. This prohibition extends to AI writing tools like Grammarly and Wordtuner, as well as GAI tools such as ChatGPT, Copilot, Writesonic, Rytr, and Rtutor. If you are uncertain about using a particular tool to support your work, please consult with me before using it.

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.

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. 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 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
- Student Care and Outreach: sco.uga.edu
- University Health Center: healthcenter.uga.edu
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services: caps.uga.edu or CAPS 24/7 crisis support at 706-542-2273
- Health Promotion/Fontaine Center: healthpromotion.uga.edu
- Disability Resource Center and Testing Services: 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.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Class	Class Date	Subject	Assignment
1	8/18	Syllabus Day	--
2	8/20	Supreme Court History	Watch: C-SPAN, "The Supreme Court: Home to America's Highest Court," https://tinyurl.com/5az5t2f6
3	8/25	Federal Judiciary Rules and Structure	Read: Baum (2016), Chapter 1
4	8/27	Models of Decision Making	Read: Black, Owens, Wedeking, and Wohlfarth (2020), Chapter 2
5	9/1	Logistics of Implementation	Read: Baum (2016), Chapter 6
6	9/3	Legitimacy and Legitimation	Read: - Armaly, King, Lane, and Schoenherr (Forthcoming) - Krewson (2019)
7	9/8	UNIT 1 QUIZ	--
8	9/10	Social Science Research, Part 1	Read: Black, Owens, Wedeking, and Wohlfarth (2020), Chapter 3
9	9/15	Social Science Research, Part 2	Read: Long, https://bit.ly/3sAfEXV
10	9/17	Retirements and Selection	Read: - Black and Owens (2016) Watch: - Frontline, "Supreme Revenge," https://tinyurl.com/8u998kj
11	9/22	Nominations and Confirmations	Read: - Schoenherr, Lane, and Armaly (2020) - Hassett, Lane, and Schoenherr (2024)
12	9/24	Certiorari and Clerks	Read: - Black and Owens (2021) - Lane, Schoenherr, Schutte, and Black (2020)
13	9/29	Setting the Agenda	Read: Black and Boyd (2013)
14	10/1	UNIT 2 QUIZ	--
15	10/6	BOOK CLUB, PART 1	--
16	10/8	Merits Briefs and Legal Arguments	Read: - Schoenherr and Black (2019b) - Lane and Schoenherr (Forthcoming)

17	10/13	Attorneys and the Solicitor General	Read: - Schoenherr and Waterbury (2022) Listen: - More Perfect, "The Imperfect Plaintiffs," https://bit.ly/37gH7SF
18	10/15	Oral Arguments	Read: - Black, Johnson, Owens, and Wedeking (2024) - Johnson, Wahlbeck, and Spriggs (2006)
19	10/20	Conference and Opinion Assignment	Read: King and Schoenherr (2024)
20	10/22	Bargaining and Opinion Writing	Read: - Maltzman, Spriggs, and Wahlbeck (2000), Chapter 1 Listen: - More Perfect, "The Political Thicket," https://bit.ly/37gGU1P
21	10/27	UNIT 3 QUIZ	--
22	10/29	Recusal	Read: Black and Bryan (2014)
23	11/3	Judicial Ethics	Read: - Krewson, Schoenherr, and Shieh (2024) - Kantor and VanSickle (2024), https://tinyurl.com/4w4v29wa
24	11/5	Descriptive Representation	Read: - King, Schoenherr, and Ostrander (2025) Listen: - The Science of Politics, "Descriptive Representation in Supreme Court Nominations," https://tinyurl.com/mr42brza
25	11/10	Substantive Representation	Read: King, Schoenherr, and Stauffer (Forthcoming)
26	11/12	UNIT 4 QUIZ	--
27	11/17	BOOK CLUB, PART 2	--
28	11/19	Court and the Media	Read: - Cota, Houston, Lane, and Schoenherr (Forthcoming) Listen: - More Perfect, "The Court's Reporters," https://tinyurl.com/5fuc9dcw