Welcome to the Proseminar in Law and Courts. This course is intended as a Ph.D. level introduction to the Law & Courts literature. In this course we will focus on judges as the primary decision makers in many legal institutions as well as courts as institutions. We will review literature on courts primarily from the American context, although we will also spend some time reviewing the literature on comparative courts and on the use of law in international contexts.

**Goals:**

1. Students will demonstrate the ability to critically analyze the political science literature on courts.
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to synthesize social scientific work on courts and apply it to novel situations and problems.

**Readings:**

There is one required text:


Other materials will be made available or are easily accessible over the Internet. Some of the readings will also be placed on reserve in the library.

**Evaluation:**

1. **Research Paper Option:** You will complete an article length paper of publishable quality on a topic of your choosing covering courts. If you are planning on writing a dissertation in the Law & Court field then you should treat this paper as the beginning exploration of a dissertation topic. There are two requirements for this paper: (a) you must generate a testable hypothesis and (b) you must test the hypothesis using data. I can provide you with a guide to available datasets. I will provide you with further details as the semester progresses. This paper is due on *Friday, December 14th*.

2. **Exam Option:** In the final week of class you will be given a take-home exam similar in format to the types of questions I am likely to ask on a comprehensive exam. You should select this option if you do not plan on pursuing further
research in Law & Courts. The exam will be handed out sometime during the week of December 10th and we will discuss the exact timing further as we approach the exam date.

Either of the above options is worth 70% of your final grade in the course.

3. **Participation:** this course only works if you work. I expect that each of you will come to class prepared and having carefully read the assignments. You will be required to email me three discussion questions each week. Failure to do so by Wednesday at noon will result in a reduction in your course grade. Further, I expect that you will attend every session of the class and that you will participate actively in the discussions we have during class. Missing an excessive number of classes will result in a reduction in your grade.

Participation is worth 30% of your course grade. The grading scale for the course is:

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<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>90+</td>
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<td>80-89</td>
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<td>71-79</td>
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<td>70 or below</td>
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**Course Schedule:**

Introduction to the Course (August 29th)

**Why Study Courts? (September 5th)**


**How to Study Courts? (September 12th)**


Major Topics in Studying American Courts (Sept. 19th – Oct. 17th):

Judicial Decision Making

Attitudinal Approaches
Theoretical Perspectives (September 19th)


Evidence for the Influence of Preferences (September 26th)


Strategic Approaches
Theoretical Perspectives (October 3rd)


**Evidence for Strategic Thinking (October 10th)**


**Influence of Law on Decision Making (October 17th)**


**Other Concerns with Courts (Oct. 24th – Nov. 7th)**

*Selecting Judges* (October 24th)


Courts & Public Opinion (October 31st)


Agenda Setting (November 7th)


International & Comparative Courts (Nov. 14th – December 5th)

Judicial Independence & Reform (November 14th)


**Note, there is no class on November 21st.**

**Courts in Emerging Democracies & Autocratic Regimes (November 28th)**


**Constitutional Courts & International Courts (December 5th)**


**Additional UT DALLAS Policies may be found at:**

[http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies](http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies)