

**POLS 3336
Spring 2026**

**State Courts
Tuesday and Thursday, 11:00AM-12:20PM
Location: University Hall 01**

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00-10:45AM

Microsoft Teams link:

<https://teams.microsoft.com/l/team/19%3AQH2LJZd9H9mq0YgiHBXFFqbSmdHfB7ZJOeCn-yTQew1%40thread.tacv2/conversations?groupId=6cb7cb41-ca61-45e7-be18-af920773a97d&tenantId=5cdc5b43-d7be-4caa-8173-729e3b0a62d9>

I. Introduction:

As institutions, state courts provide an informative area of public law that differs greatly from the federal courts. State supreme courts, in particular, offer diverse sets of rules that affect outcomes and the characteristics of judges. This course capitalizes on fundamental differences at the state level, focusing on the characteristics of state courts as well as forms of judicial behavior. The first section of the course will focus on state methods of judicial selection and how political pressures influence those who serve. We next move to the topic of judicial behavior to evaluate judicial outcomes, including how decisions by judges are impacted by state constitutions, state laws, and the ways that judges are selected. While the federal courts have received abundant attention, state courts are sometimes neglected. This course seeks to inform students about the very different conditions that exist within state courts.

II. Course Modality

Per university policy, this is an in-person course. We will meet Tuesdays and Thursdays in University Hall 01 from 11:00AM-12:20PM, unless noted otherwise in the schedule or announced in class.

Though the course is mostly in-person, a few classes will be online and asynchronous. Presentation modules for those classes are stored in Canvas' Modules page. With each module, video and audio (generally found at the upper right corner of a slide) are embedded in the files. To view and listen to the media content, students must download the file from Canvas and open in Microsoft PowerPoint or Apple's Keynote. Where students attempt to review in Canvas, neither video nor audio will be accessible and important points will be missed.

III. Required Text:

There are two textbooks required for this class, which are available for purchase at the university bookstore or through an on-line bookseller. Both books are also fully available online through the university library. If purchasing on-line, be sure they are shipped promptly as readings will begin immediately.

1. Bonneau, Chris W. and Melinda Gann Hall, eds. 2017. *Judicial Elections in the 21st Century*. New York: Routledge. (ISBN-9781138185890).
 - a. Available online through university library: <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/books/edit/10.4324/9781315644172/judicial-elections-21st-century-melinda-gann-hall-chris-bonneau>
2. Cann, Damon, and Jeff Yates. 2016. *These Estimable Courts: Understanding Public Perceptions of State Judicial Institutions and Legal Policy-Making*. New York: Oxford University Press. (ISBN-9780199307210)
 - a. Available online through university library: <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199307210.001.0001>
3. Prepared Articles on Canvas. To access Canvas, visit <https://www.uta.edu/provost/Canvas/uta-canvas-login.php> or contact the Office of Information Technology Help Desk at 817-272-2208.
4. Linked articles below. To access, click hyperlink.

IV. Course Requirements:

1. Class Participation – While attendance will not be taken (outside of the library day, guest talks, and classes where group presentations are scheduled), students are expected to arrive on time and prepared to discuss the day's readings. While it is understood that events sometimes happen beyond our control, chronic lateness is inexcusable. Class begins at 11AM. Failure to attend class will have a direct negative result on your participation grade (10% of the course grade). I expect thoughtful participation in each class where participation reflects class engagement and careful thinking about that day's readings. Students will be called upon at random. One answer pass will be given per student during the semester; thereafter, deductions of twenty (20) percentage points will be made from the participation grade where students have not responded sufficiently or are not present.
2. Team Project and Presentation – Students are required to participate in a three or four-student team project with each presentation equal to ten minutes in length. Student assignments will be completed in class based on a random draw. Each team is expected to conduct independent research, using examples from state politics research to discuss during their presentation. Team project guidelines will be distributed on Thursday, January 22nd. Each team's power point presentation must be submitted in Canvas prior to 8PM on Monday, April 6th before 8PM and in-class presentations will begin on Tuesday, April 7th. All students are required to attend the presentations. Only scholarly citations (e.g., government sources and library books or articles downloaded from library databases, such as Lexis-Nexis, Academic Search Premier, or JSTOR) will be accepted as outside sources. All research must be cited on the last slide of the presentation. Failure to cite research is a violation of academic honesty and must be avoided. Failure to complete a presentation by a research team will result in a grade of zero and students may not re-use a presentation from another course. Use of AI software (like ChatGPT) is strictly forbidden. Confirmed or suspected use of AI software is considered academic dishonesty and violations will be submitted to UTA's Office of Community Standards. All forms of academic dishonesty (see section XI.3.) will lead to a grade of zero on the assignment. Students will receive a grade of zero where they do not assist their team partners. Team projects are worth 15% of the course grade.
3. In Class Quizzes – There will be three in-class quizzes during the semester with one quiz per section of the course. Quizzes will take place near the start class (11:05-11:20AM) and will be multiple-choice format and have five questions. Students will use their phone, tablet, or laptop to take the quiz and will be required to access Canvas where a lockdown browser setting will be used and sign in on arrival. These are closed-book quizzes and based entirely on the assigned readings. Each quiz is worth 5% of the course grade (3 X 5% = 15%).

4. Examinations – There will be two midterm examinations and one final examination. The first midterm exam is 20%, the second midterm exam is 20%, and the final exam is 20% of the course grade. Examinations will be essay and short answer format. Midterm examination #1 is on Thursday, February 12th, midterm examination #2 is on Thursday, March 26th, and the final examination is on Tuesday, May 5th from 11:00AM-1:30PM. All students will take the examinations at the designated times with no make-up examinations allowed except for medical emergencies or the death of a family member. In relation to examination absences caused by medical emergencies, the student is expected to contact the instructor during the day of the test and will be required to present proof of a physician's examination. Otherwise, failure to take an examination will result in a grade of zero.

Make-up Examination Policy

Where make-ups are permitted for a midterm examination, they must be completed within one week of the scheduled exam. Otherwise, the student will earn a grade of zero for that exam. Make-ups for the final exam, which are strongly discouraged, generally occur during the following semester. Make-up exams are more difficult due to the time that has passed since the graded material was covered.

Exam Tardiness Policy

Students entering an exam late disturb other students. Further, tardiness permits students to ask other exiting students about the content of an exam – that is obviously not fair for students that have arrived on time. Unless a prior arrangement has been made, students will receive a grade of zero when tardy for an examination.

V. Grading:

Grades will be posted in Canvas. To access the quizzes and your grades in Canvas, log in with your UTA email address and password at uta.instructure.com. If you have difficulty with Canvas, visit <https://www.uta.edu/provost//Canvas/uta-canvas-login.php> or contact the [Office of Information Technology Help Desk](#) at 817-272-2208. The grade components of the course are:

1. Participation – 10%
2. Team Project and Presentation – 15%
3. In Class Quizzes – 15%
4. Midterm Examination #1 – 20%
5. Midterm Examination #2 – 20%
6. Final Examination – 20%

The grading scale is as follows:

90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
0-59	F

VI. Class Schedule:

Date/Topic	Assignments (B&H = Bonneau and Hall's <i>Judicial Elections in the 21st Century</i> ; C&Y = Cann and Yates' <i>These Estimable Courts</i>)
<i>January</i>	
Tuesday, 1/13 Introduction to State Courts	1. Course syllabus
Thursday, 1/15 Introduction to State Courts	1. Boyea, 2025, "Politics and the Judicial Process" in Canvas
Tuesday, 1/20 Role of State Courts and Types of Laws	1. C&Y Chapter 1, "Introduction" 2. C&Y Chapter 2, "Courts We Can Believe In"
Thursday, 1/22 Role of State Courts and Types of Laws	1. C&Y Chapter 3, "These Estimable Courts: How State Court Legitimacy is Perceived by Citizens"
Tuesday, 1/27 Institutions and Legitimacy of State Courts	1. C&Y Chapter 4, "People in Robes Making Law: Citizens on the Bases of Judicial Decision-Making"
Thursday, 1/29 Library Day	1. Mandatory class with Leyla Bunster (university librarian) – location TBA 2. C&Y Chapter 5, "The Role of the Robe: Considering Courts as Policymakers"
<i>February</i>	
Tuesday, 2/3 Controversies in Selecting Judges and Quiz #1	1. C&Y Chapter 6, "Who Gets the Gavel? Citizens' Views on the Selection of Judges" 2. Gift, 2025, "Why we shouldn't read too much into the Democrats' Wisconsin Supreme Court win"
Thursday, 2/6 Controversies in Selecting Judges	1. C&Y Chapter 7, "'The Better Angels of Our Nature': On Court Legitimacy and Obeying the Law" 2. C&Y Chapter 8, "Conclusion"
Tuesday, 2/10	Midterm #1 Review
Thursday, 2/12	Midterm #1
Tuesday, 2/17 Judicial Elections	1. B&H Chapter 1, "Judicial Elections in the 21 st Century"
Thursday, 2/19 Judicial Elections	1. B&H Chapter 2, "The Changing Legal Landscape of Judicial Elections" by Geyh and Thrapp
Tuesday, 2/24 Political Competition and Participation in Judicial Elections	1. B&H Chapter 3, "Contestation and Competitiveness in State Supreme Court Elections, 1946– 2015: A State-Level Analysis" by Kritzer 2. Boyea, 2018, "States with partisan judicial elections and professionalized courts attract greater campaign contributions"
Thursday, 2/26 Political Competition and Participation in Judicial Elections	1. Q&A class with attorney/judge 2. B&H Chapter 5, "Fundraising and Spending in State Supreme Court Elections" by Bonneau
<i>March</i>	
Tuesday, 3/3 Impact of Judicial Elections	1. B&H Chapter 10, "Measuring the Impact of Election Outcomes on Voting in State Supreme Courts" by Baum, Gray, and Klein

and Quiz #2	
Thursday, 3/5 Impact of Judicial Elections	1. B&H Chapter 12, "Elections and Judicial Diversity" by Lanier and Hurwitz
March 9-13	Spring Recess
Asynchronous class Tuesday, 3/17 Judges, Lawyers, and Litigants in State Courts	1. Gill and Eugenis, 2019, "In judicial elections, women are more likely than men to unseat incumbents"
Asynchronous class Thursday, 3/19 Judges, Lawyers, and Litigants in State Courts	1. B&H Chapter 13, "Proposals for Reforms: Successes and Failures" by Bonneau and Kane
Tuesday, 3/24	Midterm #2 Review
Thursday, 3/26	Midterm #2
Tuesday, 3/31	Q&A class with attorneys
<i>April</i>	
Asynchronous class Thursday, 4/2 Jurisdiction and Policymaking	1. Boyea and Brace, 2021, "Revisiting the Business of State Supreme Courts in the 21st Century" in Canvas
Monday, 4/6	Team projects due in Canvas before 8PM (Canvas will close at 8PM; considered late thereafter)
Tuesday, 4/7 Decision-making by State Judges	1. Hall, 2014, "State supreme court justices are more likely to reverse death penalty sentences when they are term limited" 2. Group presentation #1
Thursday, 4/9 Decision-making by State Judges	1. Bikales and Somasundaram, 2022, "State supreme courts could soon decide on abortion, raising stakes of their midterm races" in Canvas 2. Group presentation #2
Tuesday, 4/14 Decision-making by State Judges and Quiz #3	1. Lindquist, 2022, "State courts from Oregon to Georgia will now decide who – if anyone – can get an abortion under 50 different state constitutions" 2. Group presentation #3
Thursday, 4/16 Judicial Review	1. Johnson, 2014, "State Supreme Courts are more likely to defer to executive branch agencies in states with institutionally powerful Governors" 2. Group presentation #4
Tuesday, 4/21 Judicial Review	1. Milov-Cordoba, 2025, "Legislative Assaults on State Courts in 2024" 2. Group presentation #5
Thursday, 4/23	Remaining group presentations
Tuesday, 4/28	Final Exam Review
<i>May</i>	
Tuesday, 5/5 11:00AM-1:30PM	Final Exam in UH 01

VII. Core Expectations and Citizenship

Expectations of Students

I have strong yet reasonable expectations for students. To perform well, students are expected to work - meaning a combination of recurrent attendance, frequent class participation, and careful attention to the readings is required. Students that do not attend class regularly, do not take careful class notes, and do not carefully read the assigned material will have a more difficult time with the exams. Additionally, I encourage students to see me during my office hours. Where questions arise about the content of the course or a student's grade, office hours represent important opportunities for interaction between students and their instructor.

Citizenship

While each student pays a significant cost to attend this course, sometimes an individual is less interested in learning, and disturbs others during class (i.e., talking, receiving or making phone calls, or text messaging). As a result of student complaints, use of cell phones during class will result in a two-point deduction from a student's final semester grade for each offense (one offense is a 2-point penalty, two offenses are a 4-point penalty, etc.). I reserve the right to ask the students to leave class when cell phone use is observed. Otherwise, do not walk in late, leave early, or push around others to find a seat once class has begun - it disturbs others! Be careful with laptop computers. Unfortunately, most students use their laptops to access the web for non-related material, play games, or read email rather than paying attention to the lecture. Where I see a laptop being used, I assume that it is being used for something other than class purposes.

Communication

The University has provided students with an official email address. All communication will be directed to you through that address, as well as announcements through Canvas. Students are responsible for checking their e-mail and Canvas regularly. Per university policy, I will not respond to non-university email addresses. Also, remember to formalize your emails by addressing the e-mail, providing a subject, and always signing your email. Note that one-line comments or questions are not enough for me to know what you are trying to say - be sure to provide enough detail about the context to allow a sufficient answer on my part.

VIII. Special Notes:

1. Cell Phones and Electronic Devices – Students are instructed to turn off their cell phones prior to class. See the comments about cell phone usage in the Citizenship section. Usage of a cell phone or other non-permitted electronic device during an examination will result in a grade of zero on that examination.
2. Test Conduct – Examinations and quizzes are closed book. Cell phones, textbooks, and open internet sites that are not Canvas are prohibited.
3. Academic Integrity - All students are expected to obey the civil and penal statutes of the State of Texas and the United States, the Regents' Rules and Regulations of The University of Texas System, the rules and regulations of the University, and the orders or instructions issued by an administrative official of the University or U.T. System in the course of his/her duties, and to observe standards of conduct that are compatible with the University's function as an educational institution. Any student found to engage in cheating, plagiarism, or collusion will be sanctioned.
4. Inclement Weather – If a class is canceled due to inclement weather, its subject will be delayed until the following class. Similarly, all tests canceled due to university closure will be delivered during the following class. For information related to weather related class cancellations please call (972) 601-2049.
5. Emergency Exit Procedures - Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit. When exiting the building

during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

6. Campus Carry - Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. Under the new law, openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/news/info/campus-carry/>.
7. Students with Disabilities - Any student with a documented disability needing academic accommodations is requested to speak with me via Microsoft Teams during the first two weeks of the course. All discussions will remain confidential.
8. Discrimination Policy – The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit <https://www.uta.edu/eos-title-ix/equal-opportunity-services>.
9. Title IX Policy - The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to maintaining a learning and working environment that is free from discrimination based on sex in accordance with Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities; Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), which prohibits sex discrimination in employment; and the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (SaVE Act). Sexual misconduct is a form of sex discrimination and will not be tolerated. For information regarding Title IX, visit <https://www.uta.edu/eos-title-ix/title-ix> or contact the Title IX Coordinator at (817) 272-7091.
10. Student Support Services - The University of Texas at Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. These resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. Among the support services on campus, the IDEAS Center (2nd Floor of Central Library) offers free tutoring to all students with a focus on transfer students, sophomores, veterans and others undergoing a transition to UT Arlington. To schedule an appointment with a peer tutor or mentor email IDEAS@uta.edu or call (817) 272-6593. For more information, students may contact the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107 or visit www.uta.edu/resources.
11. Emergency Phone Numbers - In case of an on-campus emergency, call the UT Arlington Police Department at 817-272-3003 (non-campus phone), 2-3003 (campus phone). You may also dial 911. The non-emergency number is 817-272-3381.
12. Syllabus Changes – The instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus at any time during the semester.