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PSC 370.01: The Supreme Court and Judicial Politics

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Political Science 370
The Supreme Court and Judicial Politics
Spring 1996

Jim Lopach
LA 416
243-4829

Text

Walter F. Murphy and C. Herman Pritchett, Court, Judges, and Politics, ed., 1986

Class Work

The purposes of this course are to provide an introduction to the workings of the judicial branch of government and to explore the role of the federal judiciary in the American political system. Students will be expected to read approximately 10 pages in the text for each class meeting and be prepared to participate in discussion. The class format will be discussion of this material, rather than lecture. The instructor will act as discussion leader.

Term Paper

Each student will be required to write a term paper of no more than seven pages in length. Suggestions for term paper topics are attached, and student selections must be approved by the instructor. The paper is due on April 26. Because PSc 370 is a "writing" course, the introduction to the term paper will be due on February 23. The instructor will correct this section and return it for revision and inclusion in the final paper.

Examination

There will be two examinations, a midterm and a final. The final examination will cover course material from the midterm examination to the end of the quarter. Both examinations will use questions of the following types: definition and short essay. The midterm examination will be held on a class day to be announced, and the final examination is scheduled for Thursday, May 16 at 3:20.

Grading

Class attendance and participation	- 10% (20 points)	A = 180-200 points
Term paper	- 30% (60 points)	B = 160-179 points
Midterm examination	- 30% (60 points)	C = 140-159 points
Final examination	- 30% (60 points)	D = 120-139 points
		F = -119 points

PSC 370

SUGGESTIONS FOR TERM PAPERS

1. Lawyer's fees - how set, how collected, how regulated, impact on judicial process
2. Plea bargaining - roles of various actors and as an example of judicial discretion
3. Pre-trial hearing - features, purpose, results
4. Sentencing - as an example of legislative control and judicial discretion; reform trends - e.g., Judicial Sentencing Commission
5. Juvenile justice system - tradition, criticisms, jurisdiction, functions, procedures, case load, appeal, reform alternatives

6. Classification of lawyers in Missoula - use such indicators as social and economic background, education, memberships, income, clients, specialization, work accepted and refused (Martindale-Hubbel Law Directory)
7. Judicial review - its justification in a representative democracy and criticisms; living constitution vs. strict construction; e.g., Robert H. Bork, The Tempting of America (1990); Jesse H. Choper, Judicial Review and the National Political Process (1980); John Hart Ely, Democracy and Distrust (1981); Alexander M. Bickel, The Least Dangerous Branch (1962)
8. Judicial contempt power - powers of civil contempt, criminal contempt, and a comparison
9. Judicial selection in Montana - comparison of the elective system and the appointive system with emphasis on the judiciary article in the Montana Constitution and the 1972 debate in the Montana Constitutional Convention
10. Decisionmaking on the U.S. Supreme Court - use Walter Murphy, Elements of Judicial Strategy; Bob Woodward, The Brethren; or David O'Brien, Storm Center
11. Office of Montana Attorney General - organization, duties, work load, budget, governmental relationships, staffing, achievements, problems.
12. Office of Missoula City Attorney - same sub-topics as for #11
13. Public prosecutor - Office of Missoula County Attorney with emphasis on chief deputy county attorney with prosecuting function; same sub-topics as for #11
14. Public defender - organization in Missoula County, funding, duties, pay, workload, examples of cases, clients, record in court, alternatives
15. ASUM Legal Services - same sub-topics as for #14
16. Legal education - traditions, alternatives, innovations, Montana Law School curriculum reform
17. Montana Judicial Standards Commission - organization, purpose, duties, statement of judicial ethics, discipline of Montana judges
18. Montana Commission on Practice - organization, purpose, duties, statement of attorney ethics, discipline of the Montana bar
19. Television and trials - philosophy of open procedures and conflict with judicial efficiency and court-room decorum; lessons from Simpson case
20. Justice of the peace court - tradition, jurisdiction, functions, procedures, case load, decision making, appeal, administration, staffing, budget, strengths, criticisms, reform alternatives
21. City of Missoula Municipal Court - same as for #20
22. Montana district court - same as for #20
23. U.S. district court - same as for #20
24. Montana supreme court - same as for #20
25. Law firm - organization, specializations, operations, administration, resources, various models
26. Jury - tradition and philosophy, role vis'a vis judges, selection procedure and use of social scientists, behavior of members, developments in size and unanimity requirements

27. Grand jury - purpose and tradition, roles, procedures, alternatives
28. Representational litigation - amicus curiae briefs, class actions, test cases, associational standing, litigating groups, litigation costs
29. Judicial biography - review of judicial behavior literature and comparison of background of a Supreme Court Justice to decisions and opinions on Court:

a. William H. Rehnquist	l. Oliver Wendell Holmes
b. Thurgood Marshall	m. Sandra Day O'Connor
c. Warren E. Burger	n. Abe Fortas
d. William J. Brennan	o. Harry Blackmun
e. John Marshall Harlan	p. Louis Brandeis
f. William O. Douglas	q. John Marshall
g. Earl Warren	r. Roger B. Taney
h. Felix Frankfurter	s. Clarence Thomas
i. Hugo Black	t. Charles E. Hughes
j. Benjamin Cardozo	u. Ruth Bader Ginsburg
30. Indian courts - description of tribal government courts with respect to their organization, authorization, jurisdiction, conflicts with state courts, and reform proposals
31. Political trial - definition, examples, and critique
32. Office of U.S. Solicitor General - role, duties, official relationships, contribution to U.S. Supreme Court, examples
33. Law clerks - purpose, duties, and influence, especially on the U.S. Supreme Court (e.g., see W.O. Douglas, The Court Years; D. O'Brien, Storm Center)
34. Special juries - purpose and use in complicated civil suits (89 Yale Law Journal 1155)
35. Environmental court - reform proposal for special jurisdiction federal court
36. Child custody proceeding - critique of this aspect of family law with reform suggestions
37. Jurisprudence - analysis of one of the major schools or movements in jurisprudence (e.g., review writings of Pound, Cardozo, Frank, Dworkin, Bork):

a. original intent	c. feminist jurisprudence
b. critical legal theory	d. sociological jurisprudence
38. Court martial - organization and purpose of military courts and their relationship to federal judicial system
39. Selection of U.S. Supreme Court Justices - commentary on the process by a critique of the Robert Bork controversy or the Clarence Thomas controversy