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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class attendance and participation</td>
<td>10% (20 points)</td>
<td>A = 180-200 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term paper</td>
<td>30% (60 points)</td>
<td>B = 160-179 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm examination</td>
<td>30% (60 points)</td>
<td>C = 140-159 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final examination</td>
<td>30% (60 points)</td>
<td>D = 120-139 points</td>
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<td>F = 119 points</td>
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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)


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*


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
   b. Thurgood Marshall
   c. Warren E. Burger
   d. William J. Brennan
   e. John Marshall Harlan
   f. William O. Douglas
   g. Earl Warren
   h. Felix Frankfurter
   i. Hugo Black
   j. Benjamin Cardozo
   k. Oliver Wendell Holmes
   l. Sandra Day O'Connor
   m. Abe Fortas
   n. Harry Blackmun
   o. Louis Brandeis
   p. John Marshall
   q. Roger B. Taney
   r. Clarence Thomas
   s. Charles E. Hughes
   t. 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
   b. critical legal theory
   c. feminist jurisprudence
   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