

PLSC 473: American Judicial Behavior

Fall 2015

As noted on the syllabus, 45 percent of your grade in the course will comprise either (a) a course project / paper, or (b) a take-home final examination. **Course enrollees are required to indicate to the instructor (in person or via e-mail) which option they choose by 5 p.m. EDT on October 9, 2015.**

Final Examination Guidelines

The final examination will be a take-home, essay-format exam. The general structure of the exam will involve using data to investigate and answer a series of questions about U.S. Supreme Court decision making. Exam answers will be structured as essays. The exam format will also involve some level of choice of topics (e.g., “answer one of the three questions in Part I, and one of the three questions in Part II”).

The exam will be distributed electronically on December 10, 2015 (the last regularly-scheduled day of the course). Exam answers will be due (also electronically) no later than 5:00 p.m. ET on December 17, 2015.

Course Paper Guidelines

In lieu of a final exam, course enrollees may opt to write a research paper. The goals of the paper, in rough rank order of their importance, are:

- To demonstrate your understanding of the core content of the course, and in particular the various influences on judicial decision making;
- To demonstrate your mastery of the analytical approaches covered in the course; and
- To address a (potentially novel) aspect of judicial behavior in an empirical fashion.

The general form of the paper will be akin to that of a “research note,” as are commonly published in some social science journals. The total length of the paper should not exceed 5000 words of text (that’s about 15 pages), but feel free to include as many references, tables and figures as you deem necessary. While you are welcome to collect your own data for the project, time and effort constraints will very likely make doing so infeasible, and you are encouraged to use data from the course github site (or other existing sources) for the project.

Students choosing to write papers will also be required to meet the following deadlines (numbers in parentheses are the percent of the total course grade that each component is worth):

- **October 16:** Submission of a short (2-3 sentence) paper topic description (5%).
- **November 20:** Submission of either a detailed paper outline or a detailed (2-3 page) abstract of the entire paper, including major question(s), data sources, and analytic approaches (10%).
- **December 17:** Submission of the final paper (30%).