

PROBLEMS IN AMERICAN POLITICS: RESEARCH IN JUDICIAL POLITICS

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POLI:3113
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The essence of this course is to teach you how research is done in political science and, more specifically, in the study of judicial politics. The best way to learn the basics of research is to actually participate in an ongoing research project. The research for this course consists of three basic activities: data gathering, data entry, and data validation. After a few weeks of training I will assign you a set of 100 cases, from which you will complete about 10 cases per week. You will do the data gathering, entry, and validation for these cases. This will give everyone maximum exposure to several aspects of the project. For data gathering, you will become familiar with the law library and several sources of case information. For data entry, you will access the University computer system and will use the database program Microsoft Access. For data validation, you will learn how to cross-check the data and resolve inconsistencies and problems. The combination of the three stages will give anyone planning on law or graduate school an opportunity to get some hands-on experience in doing legal and judicial research. Because I do not expect you to have extensive knowledge of our judicial system (just what you learned in my courses!), you will also have the opportunity to learn much more about the judicial process, mostly at the Supreme Court level, but a fair amount about other courts as well. At the data gathering stage you will be reading cases and short case summaries, so you will also learn the basics of many different areas of the law.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

The biggest requirement is a willingness to learn and work on the project. I can teach you what you need to know, but you need to be interested in learning and doing the work. Although I expect you to know the material from my course(s), I will show you how to use the necessary materials in the law library. (A definite plus if you are planning on law school!) For the computer work the course was designed for a PC running a Windows program, but you can use a PC or Appel-based laptop. If you are familiar with Windows, or a database program, it will help, but if not, it should not require much instruction to show you the basics of how to use the program and enter data.

At the beginning of the semester more work will be required to learn the details of the project. Overall, the time required is flexible in that you may want to put more time in at the beginning of the semester so you have more time for your other courses at the end. There will be a regular weekly meeting (scheduled for Wednesdays, 6:30-9:00pm in 150 SH). For the first several weeks, class periods will be used to familiarize you with the software we will be using, the sources in the law library, and the details of the project. After that the weekly meetings will be used to give progress reports and discuss the work. I often give mini-lectures on various topics during the weekly meetings to provide a deeper understanding of the judicial process.

Everyone in the course must have an active email account. Email messages will be used as a quick way to exchange information regarding the research and all students must have an account that they check regularly.

TEXTS, READING MATERIALS, ETC.

There are no required textbooks, but you should have a law dictionary. Much of what you will be doing involves reading legal material and you will undoubtedly encounter many legal terms with which you are unfamiliar. Because you will be reading these materials to understand what happened in the cases so that you may then code them properly, you will need to know the meanings of the various legal terms you encounter.

"Coursepack" (available on ICON)

The main coursepack contains the following materials you will need for the course:

1. Codebook and Training Manual
2. Field Codes and List Box Values
3. Outline of Procedures
4. Notes for Three Sample Cases
5. Basic Form Examples
6. Map of District and Appellate Court Boundaries

In addition to the main coursepack you will need to make hard copies of the codesheet that will be used for the project.

ICON

Several additional materials for the course are also posted on ICON. Some of these may need to be printed for class use. In particular: a set of 45 pages for three sample cases – these pages go with the Notes in the main coursepack

Other Items

In addition to the main coursepack (and any books you purchase), you will need to have the following items:

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| 1. money for the law library copier (about \$25) | 3. a pair of scissors |
| 2. a roll of Scotch brand Magic tape | 4. a package of Post-it-type notes |

As part of your work, you will be making copies of case summaries and taping them to codesheets. The copiers at the law library only take change now and you will need to make at least 200 copies.

GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS

Grades will be based on the timing and quality of the work done. As indicated above, I will assign you a set of 100 cases. This is the minimum number of cases you need to complete. Once we have passed the training period, you will turn in sets of 10 completed cases per week. I will evaluate the quality of these cases and give you progress reports for each set of cases. I will also keep a record of the timeliness with which you turn in completed cases and do follow-up work on cases that need additional information or verification.

TOPICS AND READINGS

Below is a tentative schedule for the first part of the course. Additional details about the assignments will be made in class.

Note: Attendance is mandatory during the first weeks of training.

1/22	Topic: Introduction: Windows, Microsoft Access, accessing files via laptop, etc. Read: syllabus, materials in main coursepack Assmt: be able to access and open MS Access database files in course space (due ASAP)
1/29	Topic: Docket Database, Law Library Read: materials in coursepack, additional handouts Assmt: three sample cases, five cases in coursepack <u>Note:</u> Some time between 1/23 and 1/29 (or so) you will tour the law library on your own.
2/5	Topic: Docket Database, Law Library Read: materials in coursepack, additional handouts Assmt: three sample cases, four cases in coursepack
2/12	Topic: Docket Database, Law Library Read: materials in coursepack, additional handouts Assmt: 3 cases (due 2/14)
2/19	Topic: Docket Database Read: materials in coursepack, additional handouts Assmt: 7 cases (due 2/21)

A FINAL COMMENT

I have found that students have a tendency to suffer in silence. By that I mean you may not say anything to me if you are having problems with the course. This does no one any good. If you have a problem with some aspect of the course come and talk to me about it. I cannot discuss or try to correct problems if I do not know they exist. Waiting until course evaluations to voice your concerns will probably not help either one of us.

Continue to Parts 2 (policy statements) and 3 (bureaucratic mumbo jumbo) of the syllabus.

COMPUTER PROCEDURES

Here is a brief list of procedures to follow when using an ITC on a PC running Windows (or at least Windows 7; if an ITC is using a newer version the way you get to the programs and directories may be different). (You don't actually have to use an ITC to access course files anymore, but this is the default procedure. If you wish to use your own laptop, as most do, you will need to make sure you can get to and use the course files from your own computer either using campus WiFi or from home. I'll discuss this in greater detail the first class period.)

1. Come to an ITC when it is open for general use (i.e., not scheduled for other classes). Check the bulletin boards inside and outside the ITC for the schedule. Be aware of any "holes" in the regular schedule (i.e., times in the middle of the day when the lab is closed).
2. ITC computers are now left on all the time, but if the screen for the computer you want to use is blank it may be off or in sleep mode. Move the mouse around to see if the computer is in sleep mode or check the power for the monitor and computer. (If the power is not on it may be due to a problem with the computer. Check with the lab monitor to be sure.) Whether just turned on or when coming back from the screen saver the computer will eventually get to a Welcome to Windows box instructing you to press **Ctrl-Alt-Del** to begin. Doing so brings up an Log On box that instructs you to log on using your **User name** and **Password**. Do so and click **OK**.
3. The startup procedures continue and you are left at the initial Windows screen. If you have not done so elsewhere, you may want to check your email to see if there have been any course related messages.
4. Next click the Windows logo in the bottom left of the screen (**Start**). The menu that pops up has programs you used in the left column and some categories in the right. The first time you use the new ITC system the left side will be empty except for default programs. Assuming the left side is empty (or at least does not contain Microsoft Access), you can start by either searching for a particular file and then double clicking it to open the associated program, or you can open the program and then look for the file you want.
5. If you wish to open the program first, move the cursor to the **All Programs** tab at the bottom. After a moment the list of programs should appear. Look for **Microsoft Office** and then **Microsoft Access** and click on it. (The files you will work with were created with an older version of MS Access but that shouldn't make a difference. Just make sure you don't convert your files to a newer version.) The program may need to initialize or install if it's the first time you've used it. When the program opens there will be an empty data area on the right and other information on the left. If you've opened MS Access before you may be able to see previously opened files. If not, you can either click on the logo at the top left and then on **Open**. A box then opens and you can click on **Computer** on the left. Look for **iowa shared** (possibly assigned drive letter U). Then choose the following folders: **CLAS, GeneralUse, PoliSci, Hagle**. You should then see the course files. Select the one with your name on it (or an example file) and click **Open** (or just double-click the name). You will then be asked for a password which you should enter in the dialog box and click **OK**. (No password is needed for the example files.) The first time you open a file you may get a **Security Warning**, just click on **Enable Content**. If you are asked to treat the file as a **Trusted Document**, click **Yes**. The next screen should have the **Forms** objects showing in the left column. (If **Forms** is not showing, click the down arrow and select it.) Select the **Basic** form by double-clicking on it. You may then begin working with your file.
6. If you start by searching for the file, begin by clicking on **My Computer** and among the assigned network drives choose **Shared**, then **CLAS, GeneralUse, PoliSci, Hagle**.
7. When you have finished working with your file, close the file and exit Access by clicking on the **X** in the upper right corner of the Access window. This will return you to the Windows start screen. Press **Ctrl-Alt-Del** and then **Log off**. Although the computers will automatically log you off after a certain period of inactivity, be sure to log off so someone else cannot access the course files.

Access to the course files is controlled by changing the rights of individual users, so you will have access to the course files whenever you login. ITS regularly updates the ITC system. This sometimes results in variations among the ITCs, or even among the computers in a particular ITC (usually the larger ones). For example, in previous years we could access the course files from only some of the computers in the library's ITC, and there were a few other ITCs where we encountered problems. Thus, you need to let everyone else in the class know via the listserv if you have problems at a particular ITC.

The ITS website has some articles with information on connecting to the UI wireless network as well as mapping network drives. If they don't help you should contact the ITS Help Desk for assistance.