

POLS 4320: The Judicial System and Process
Tuesday 2:00pm – 4:45pm
Ratliff Building North, Room 3040
The University of Texas at Tyler
Fall 2026



Professor Eric A. Lopez

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Office Hours: T/Th, 10:00am-11:00am & 12:30pm-2:00pm; other times by appointment

Email: elopez@uttyler.edu

- I will only reply to email from an official UT-Tyler email account
- Expect a response within 12 hours (except on weekends)

Course Description and Objectives

The underlying question guiding the course is how the judiciary shapes public policy in the American political system, through its ability to say what the law is. To answer this question, the course will provide an introduction to the law and an examination of the institutions (e.g., rules, norms) and actors (e.g., judges, the political branches of government) that shape the American legal system at both the federal and state level. At the course's completion, students should be able to understand how the legal system works, explain the actors whom influence the legal system, identify why the judiciary is

considered the source of non-incremental change, and most importantly, comprehend how the outputs of the legal system affect society.

Required Texts

- 1) Carp, Manning, Holmes, & Bowie. 2025. *Judicial Process in America*. Sage (13th Edition).
- 2) Lawrence Baum. 2024. *The Supreme Court*. Sage (15th Edition).
- 3) The Professor, through Canvas, will post all class readings and material.

Requirements, Grades, and Dates

The composition of the student's final grade will consist of two in-class exams (a Midterm and Final Exam), two in-class assignments, and six in-class unannounced quizzes. None of these assignments are cumulative.

The exams will be held on the dates specified below. The format of each exam will be detailed during the class period prior, and a review session will also be held prior to each exam. The in-class assignments will be explained as the semester progresses, with ample time for students to work on them. And, six in-class, unannounced quizzes will be given throughout the semester. Only four of the six quizzes will count toward your final grade (i.e., your two lowest quiz scores will be dropped). **Absolutely no make-ups will be permitted. And you must be present in class to take a quiz.**

Importantly, if a student misses more than one quiz before an exam, they will incur a 10-point deduction on that next upcoming exam. This policy applies only to the nearest exam and once the Midterm has been taken, the count resets for the next exam period.

Grade Distribution

The following are the weights given to the exams, the research papers, and the quizzes and the date each will be held:

Assignment	Due Date (Subject to Change)	Grade Percentage
Midterm	Tuesday, October 6, 2026	30%
In-Class Assignment #1	Tuesday, October 6, 2026	10%
Final Exam	Tuesday, December 1, 2026	30%
In-Class Assignment #2	Tuesday, December 1, 2026	10%
Quizzes	Assigned Throughout	20%

Final grades will be granted on the following scale: A=100%-90%, B=89%-80%, C=79%-70%, D=69%-60%, and F=59%-50%.

Class and University Policies

(The following information is also provided within Canvas, specifically in the UT Tyler Syllabus Module)

UT-Tyler Honor Code

Every member of the UT-Tyler community joins together to embrace: Honor and integrity that will not allow me to lie, cheat, or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do.

Academic Honesty and Academic Misconduct

The UT Tyler community comes together to pledge that "Honor and integrity will not allow me to lie, cheat, or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do." Therefore, we enforce the [Student Conduct and Discipline policy](#) in the Student Manual Of Operating Procedures (Section 8).

Attendance Policy

Your attendance in this course is not mandatory and your grade in this course will not suffer directly from missing class (i.e., there is not an attendance grade). **If you do attend class, no electronic devices are allowed (this includes cell phones and laptops).** Give my teaching philosophy, the examination material in this course is not only based on the required readings, but on class participation and class discussions, which means that your grade will almost certainly suffer by missing too many classes. Further, borderline grades will be determined by the quality of your overall contribution to the course.

Class notes, either of my own or transcribed by other students, will only be made available to those students who miss class due to their observance of holidays and special events by organized religions or to students that have a pre-approved absence by the Dean of Students. For those students that attend lecture, photography of any class notes/lectures is strictly prohibited. Any student found in violation will be asked to leave class for the day. And, electronic devices must be silenced during class (if possible, please turn off all electronic devices) unless you have received prior permission from the Professor. Any such device that interrupts class will be confiscated and returned to the student during the Professor's office hours.

To reiterate, no cell phones or laptops are allowed during class. You will need to bring pen and paper to adequately participate in this course.

"Make-Up" Policy

Make-up exams will only be offered to those students that have a University approved absence, a doctor's note detailing your inability to take the exam on the date provided on this syllabus, or a sudden emergency (e.g., a death in your family, a sudden illness) that prohibits your attendance for an exam. Anyone who has not satisfied any of these requirements and does not take the exam will be given a grade of "0." ***Remember, no make-ups are allowed for students that miss quizzes distributed during class time.***

If any conflict (other tests, travel plans, etc.) with either of the exams exists, notify me by Thursday, September 3, 2026. Be advised that allowances will only be given in extreme cases with my discretion as to what I define as extreme. (see also: *Student Absence for University-Sponsored Events and Activities* and *Student Absence Due to Religious Observance* sections of the syllabus).

Absence for Official University Events and Activities

This course follows the practices related to [Excused Absences for University Events or Activities](#) as noted in the Catalog.

Absence for Religious Holidays

This course follows the practices related to [Excused Absences for Religious Holy Days as noted in the Catalog](#).

Absence for Pregnant Students

This course follows the requirements of Texas Laws SB 412, SB 459, SB 597/HB 1361 to meet the needs of pregnant and parenting students. Part of the supports afforded pregnant students includes excused absences. Faculty who are informed by a student of needing this support should make a referral to the Parenting Student Liaison. NOTE: Students must work with the Parenting Student Liaison in order to receive these supports. Students should reach out to the Parenting Student Liaison at parents@uttyler.edu and also complete the [Pregnant and Parenting Self-Reporting Form](#).

Class Discussion and Threatening Behavior

Given the nature of political discourse, some of the topics discussed and debated in class may be sensitive to some students. It is expected that students, regardless of the subject matter, maintain civility in their class comments. The University and the Professor seek to promote a safe environment where students may participate in debates, discussion, and other objectives concurrent with the educational process without compromising their health, safety, and welfare. Concurrent with this ideal, mutual courtesy and respect should govern all classroom conduct. Therefore, threats of physical harm or verbal abuse will not be tolerated in this class.

Artificial Intelligence Statement

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy. *Refer to the About This Course section of the UT Tyler Syllabus Module for specific information on appropriate use of AI in your course(s).*

Campus Carry

We respect the right and privacy of students who are duly licensed to carry concealed weapons in this class. License holders are expected to behave responsibly and keep a handgun secure and concealed. More information is available at <http://www.uttyler.edu/about/campus-carry/index.php>.

Disability/Accessibility Services

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA), the University of Texas at Tyler offers accommodations to students with learning, physical, and/or psychological disabilities. If you have a disability, including a non-visible diagnosis such as a learning disorder, chronic illness, TBI, PTSD, ADHD, or a history of modifications or accommodations in a previous educational environment, you are encouraged to visit <https://hood.accessiblelearning.com/UTTyler/> and fill out the New Student application. The Student Accessibility and Resources (SAR) office will contact you when your application has been submitted and an appointment with the Assistant Director Student Accessibility and Resources/ADA Coordinator. For more information, including filling out an application for services, please visit the SAR webpage

at <https://www.uttyler.edu/disability-services>, the SAR office located in the Robert Muntz Library, LIB 460, email saroffice@uttyler.edu, or call 903.566.7079."

If you are registered with the SAR office, please set up a meeting with the Professor to discuss what specific accommodations should be made to ensure your success in the class.

Military Affiliated Students

UT Tyler honors the service and sacrifices of our military-affiliated students. If you are a student who is a veteran, on active duty, in the reserves or National Guard, or a military spouse or dependent, please stay in contact with your faculty member if any aspect of your present or prior service or family situation makes it difficult for you to fulfill the requirements of a course or creates disruption in your academic progress. It is important to make your faculty member aware of any complications as far in advance as possible. Your faculty member is willing to work with you and, if needed, put you in contact with university staff who are trained to assist you. The [Military and Veterans Success Center \(MVSC\)](#) has campus resources for military-affiliated students. The MVSC can be reached at MVSC@uttyler.edu or via phone at 903.565.5972.

Students on an F-1 Visa

To remain in compliance with Federal Regulations requirements you must do the following:

- Traditional face-to-face classes: Attend classes on the regular meeting days/times.
- Hybrid Classes: Attend all face-to-face classes convened by the instructor according to the schedule set for your specific course.
- Online course: Only one online course can count toward your full-time enrollment. Students are expected to be fully engaged and meet all requirements for the online course.

Grade Replacement/Forgiveness and Census Date Policies

Students repeating a course for grade forgiveness (grade replacement) must file a Grade Replacement Contract with the Enrollment Services Center (ADM 230) on or before the Census Date of the semester in which the course will be repeated. Grade Replacement Contracts are available in the Enrollment Services Center or at: <http://www.uttyler.edu/registrar>. Each semester's Census Date can be found on this syllabus, the Contract itself, on the Academic Calendar, or in the information pamphlets published each semester by the Office of the Registrar.

Failure to file a Grade Replacement Contract will result in both the original and repeated grade being used to calculate your overall grade point average. Undergraduates are eligible to exercise grade replacement for only three course repeats during their career at UT Tyler; graduates are eligible for two grade replacements. Full policy details are printed on each Grade Replacement Contract.

The Census Date is the deadline for many forms and enrollment actions of which students need to be aware. These include:

- Submitting Grade Replacement Contracts, Transient Forms, requests to withhold directory information, approvals for taking courses as Audit, Pass/Fail or Credit/No Credit.
- Receiving 100% refunds for partial withdrawals. (There is no refund for these after the Census Date)
- Schedule adjustments (section changes, adding a new class, dropping without a "W" grade)
- Being reinstated or re-enrolled in classes after being dropped for non-payment
- Completing the process for tuition exemptions or waivers through Financial Aid

The Census Date for this semester is Tuesday, September 8, 2026.

Withdrawing from Class

course can impact your Financial Aid, Scholarships, Veteran Benefits, Exemptions, Waivers, International Student Status, housing, and degree progress. Please speak with your instructors, consider your options, speak with your advisor, and visit the One-Stop Service Center (STE 230) or email enroll@uttyler.edu to get a complete review of your student account and the possible impacts to withdrawing. We want you to make an informed decision. UT Tyler faculty and staff are here for you and often can provide additional support options or assistance. Make sure to carefully [read the implications for withdrawing from a course and the instructions](#) on using the [Withdrawal portal](#)..

Texas law prohibits students from dropping more than six courses during their entire undergraduate career*. The six courses dropped includes those from other 2-year or 4-year Texas public colleges and universities. Consider the impact withdrawing from this class has on your academic progress and other areas, such as financial implications. We encourage you to consult your advisor(s) and Enrollment Services for additional guidance. **CAUTION #1:** Withdrawing before census day does not mean you get a full refund. Please see the [Tuition and Fee Refund Schedule](#). **CAUTION #2:** All international students must check with the [Office of International Programs](#) before withdrawing. All international students are required to enroll full-time for fall and spring terms. **CAUTION #3:** All UT Tyler Athletes must check with the Athletic Academic Coordinator before withdrawing from a course. **CAUTION #4:** All veterans or military-affiliated students should consult with the [Military and Veterans Success Center](#).

**** Students who began college for the first time before 2007 are exempt from this law.***

FERPA

UT Tyler follows the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as noted in [University Policy 5.2.3](#). The course instructor will follow all requirements to protect your confidential information.

Final Exam Policy

Final examinations are administered as scheduled. If unusual circumstances require that special arrangements be made for an individual student or class, the Dean of the appropriate college, after consultation with the faculty member involved, may authorize an exception to the schedule. Faculty members must maintain student final examination papers for a minimum of three months following the examination date.

Incomplete Grade Policy

If a student, because of extenuating circumstances, is unable to complete all of the requirements for a course by the end of the semester, then the instructor may recommend an Incomplete (I) for the course. The "I" may be assigned in place of a grade *only when all of the following conditions are met:* (a) the student has been making satisfactory progress in the course; (b) the student is unable to complete all coursework or final exam due to unusual circumstances that are beyond personal control and are acceptable to the instructor, and (c) the student presents these reasons before the time that the final grade roster is due. The semester credit hours for an Incomplete will not be used to calculate the grade point average.

The student and the instructor must submit an Incomplete Form detailing the work required and the time by which the work must be completed to their respective department chair or college dean for

approval. The time limit established must not exceed one year. Should the student fail to meet all of the work for the course within the time limit, then the instructor may assign zeros to the unfinished work, compute the course average for the student, and assign the appropriate grade. If a grade has yet to be assigned within one year, then the Incomplete will be changed to an F, or NC. If the course was initially taken under the CR/NC grading basis, this may adversely affect the student's academic standing.

Grade Appeal Policy

Disputes regarding grades must be initiated within sixty (60) days from the date of receiving the final course grade by filing a Grade Appeal Form with the instructor who assigned the grade. A grade appeal should be used when the student thinks the final course grade awarded does not reflect the grades earned on assessments or follow the grading scale as documented in the syllabus. The student should provide the rationale for the grade appeal and attach supporting document about the grades earned. The form should be sent via email to the faculty member who assigned the grade. The faculty member reviews the rationale and supporting documentation and completes the instruction section of the form. The instructor should return the form to the student, even if a grade change is made at this level. If the student is not satisfied with the decision, the student may appeal in writing to the Chairperson of the department from which the grade was issued. In situations where there is an allegation of capricious grading, discrimination, or unlawful actions, appeals may go beyond the Chairperson to the Dean or the Dean's designee of the college from which the grade was issued, with that decision being final. The Grade Appeal form is found in the [Registrar's Form Library](#).

NOTE: The Grade Appeal Form is different from the Application for Appeal form submitted to the Student Appeals Committee, which does not rule on grade disputes as described in this policy.

Student Resources

In Canvas, open the UT-Tyler Syllabus Module to view a list of resources to assist you in the course and resources available to all UT-Tyler students.

Emergency Exits and Evacuation

Everyone is required to exit the building when a fire alarm goes off. Follow your instructor's directions regarding the appropriate exit. If you require assistance during an evacuation, inform your instructor in the first week of class. Do not re-enter the building unless given permission by University Police, Fire department, or Fire Prevention Services.

Changes to the Syllabus

The information contained in the course syllabus, with the exception of the grading criteria, attendance policy, and the make-up policy, may be subject to change with reasonable advance notice as long as the change is without prejudice to the students.

Course Outline and Readings (subject to change)

Week 1 (August 25)

Introduction to the Course

- Overview of the course, class and university policies, and the syllabus.

Foundations of American Law

- Carp et al., Chapter 1

- The U.S. Constitution (Canvas)
- Paulsen et al., pages 19-28 & 35-45 (Canvas)
- “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” (Canvas)

Week 2 (September 1)

continue, Foundations of American Law

U.S. Federal Courts

- Carp et al., Chapter 2
- Baum, Chapter 1
- Murphy et al., pages 38-57 & pages 77-102 (Canvas)

Week 3 (September 8)

9/8: CENSUS DATE

Purpose and Power of Courts

- *Federalist* #78 & #81 (Canvas)
- *Marbury v. Madison* (1803) (Canvas)
- Benedict, Chapter 6 (Canvas)
- Justice Gibson’s Dissent, *Eakin v. Raub* (1825) (Canvas)
- “Southern Manifesto on Integration.” (Canvas)

Week 4 (September 15)

Federal Judges

- Carp et al., Chapter 6
- Baum, Chapter 2

Week 5 (September 22)

Limits on Judicial Power

- Carp et al., Chapter 4
- Murphy et al., pages 253-273 (Canvas)
- Segal and Spaeth, pages 223-239 (Canvas)

Week 6 (September 29)

Judicial Policymaking

- Carp et al., Chapter 7
- Epstein and Segal, Chapter 3 (Canvas)

Week 7 (October 6)

2:00pm-3:00pm: Catch-Up/Review for Midterm

3:00pm-5:00pm: Midterm

- **In-Class Assignment #1 Due**

Week 8 (October 13)

Judicial Decision Making: Trial and Collegial Courts

- Carp et al., Chapters 12 and 13
- Barrett, Amy. 2013. "Precedent and Jurisprudential Disagreement." *Texas Law Review*. (Canvas)

Week 9 (October 20)

U.S. Supreme Court Cases

- Baum, Chapter 3
- Vladeck, Stephen. *The Shadow Docket*. Chapter 1 (Canvas)
- Segal et al., Chapter 11 (Canvas)
- Lincoln, Abraham. "First Inaugural Address."

Week 10 (October 27)

U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

- Baum, Chapters 4 & 5
- Segal et al. Chapter 12 (Canvas)

10/30: Last Day to Withdraw from one or more 15-week courses

Week 11 (November 3)

Impact of the U.S. Supreme Court

- Carp et al., Chapter 14
- Baum, Chapter 6
- Segal et al. Chapter 12 (Canvas)

Week 12 (November 10)

U.S. Supreme Court: Case Studies

- TBD: By this point in the semester, students will identify areas of Constitutional Law they are interested in exploring. The purpose is to see how particular decisions have impacted society (e.g., abortion, affirmative action, gun rights).

Week 13 (November 17)

U.S. Supreme Court and the Death Penalty

- Epstein, McGuire, and Walker, pages 491-512

Week 14 (November 23-27)

THANKSGIVING BREAK! NO CLASSES

Week 15 (December 1)

2:00pm-3:00pm: Catch-Up/Review for the Final Exam

3:00pm-5:00pm: Final

- In-Class Assignment #2 Due