Contact Information
E-Mail: woodfred@msu.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 1:00-2:00 p.m. in 235 South Kedzie Hall
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Course Description
The law has been an essential instrument in the creation and maintenance of
democratic government and American society. This class will introduce students to the
structure and function of the American legal system. We will discuss philosophical debates of
how the law should be designed and operate in society. Students will become familiar with
the organization of local, state, and federal courts. Additionally, we will examine the
decision-making processes of various actors in the legal system, such as litigants, lawyers,
prosecutors, and judges. The political nature of the legal system and the voting behavior of
Supreme Court justices will be examined from the perspective of political science. Finally,
we will discuss the impact of judicial decisions on public policy.

Texts

Final Grade
30% - Examination #1 February 8th 2:40-4:00 p.m.
30% - Examination #2 March 15th 2:40-4:00 p.m.
40% - Final Examination April 30th 3:00-5:00 p.m.

4.0: 91-100% 
3.5: 86-90% 
3.0: 81-85% 
2.5: 76-80%
2.0: 71-75% 
1.5: 66-70% 
1.0: 60-65%
0.0: 0-59%

Good Example: (85*.30)+(80*.30)+(89*.40) = 85 = 3.0
Poor Example: (64*.30)+(72*.30)+(52*.40) = 62 = 1.0

Exam Policies: All examinations will be cumulative. Cheating, plagiarism, or any other act of
academic dishonesty will result in the student receiving a 0.0 for the course. Students who arrive
late to an exam after another student has already turned in their completed exam will not be
allowed to take the exam. Make-up exams will only be given for compelling reasons, such as a
serious medical emergency, hospitalization, or the death of a close friend or relative. Detailed
documentation supporting the excuse will be required. Missed examinations will be given a grade
of 0 (zero) percent.

There is no incentive for me to trick you or otherwise punish you by way of your grade in
this course. I want every student to do well in all of your endeavors. To be fair and equitable to
every student in this class, I will not make any individual exceptions to course policy unless exigent
circumstances arise that require empathy from the instructor. No extra credit assignments will be
available. Students with disabilities are responsible for seeking available assistance in a timely
manner. This syllabus should not be construed in any way as a legal contract. It is my intention to keep with the schedule laid out in this syllabus but I reserve the right to change or course topics, assignments, readings, and deadlines. Any changes to the course will be announced in class and posted on ANGEL.

**Attendance Policy & General Expectations**

I typically prefer not to have an attendance policy. However, attendance is expected. You will likely earn a poor grade if you do not regularly attend class. Lecture notes will not be posted online. Not all of the material covered in lectures or on examinations will come from only the assigned readings. The reproduction, distribution, or publication (on-line or otherwise) of abbreviated, transcribed, or taped versions of my lectures is not permitted without my consent.

Please respect the fact that this class has a defined start and end time. Please be settled in your seat before class has begun and do not prepare to leave until the class is over in order to minimize distractions to your fellow classmates and the instructor. Be sure to turn off your cell phones when you enter the classroom. You should come to class prepared to answer questions posed by the instructor, discuss class topics, pay attention, and take notes. You will be asked to leave the room if you are using a mobile device, listening to music, reading material unrelated to the course, talking to other students around you, sleeping, or any other distracting activities.

I thank you in advance for meeting these expectations.

**Reading Assignments to be Completed Before Class**

January 9th - Syllabus Day

1. January 11th - The Meaning of Law
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 1
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: Chapter 1 (3-20)

2. January 16th - The Sources of Law
   Carp Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 1
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 1.1-1.3

3. January 18th - Thinking About the Law
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 1.4-1.6, 12.2

4. January 23rd - Designing Courts
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: Chapter 2 (38-55), 2.2, 2.3, Chapter 12 (539-558)

5. January 25th - The Federal Court System
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 2
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: Chapter 3 (77-90), 3.1-3.3, 3.6

6. January 30th - State Supreme Courts
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 3
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 3.7-3.9

7. February 1st - Becoming a Federal Judge
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 6
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 4.1-4.7

8. February 6th - Becoming a State Judge
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 5
Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 4.8, 4.9

February 8th - Examination #1

9. February 13th - Deciding to Litigate (Individuals)
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 8 (186-188)

   Felstiner, Abel, & Sarat - “The Emergence and Transformation of Disputes” Law & Society Review: Volume 15; Pages 631-654

   Engle - “The Oven Bird’s Song: Insiders, Outsiders, and Personal Injuries in an American Community” Law & Society Review: Volume 18; Pages 551-582

10. February 15th - Deciding to Litigate (Interest Groups)
    Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 8 (188-194)
    Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: Chapter 6 (261-273), 6.5, 6.6

11. February 20th - Litigant Success
    Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, Knight: 6.4


12. February 22nd - Appealing
    Barclay - “Posner’s Economic Model and the Decision to Appeal” Justice Systems Journal: Volume 19; Pages 77-99

13. February 27th - Lawyers
    Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 8 (171-186)
    Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 5.2-5.4

    Kritzer - “Contingency Fee Lawyers as Gatekeepers in the Civil Justice System” Judicature: Volume 81; Pages 22-29

    Posner - “Truth, Justice and the Client’s Interest: Can the Lawyer Serve All Three” Judicature: Volume 60; Pages 111-113

14. March 1st - Juries
    Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: Chapter 9 (383-390), 9.3-9.5, 9.7, 9.9

March 6th & 8th - Spring Break No Class

15. March 13th - Alternative Dispute Resolution
    Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 11 (265-269)

    Cooley - “Arbitration vs. Mediation - Explaining the Differences” Judicature: Volume 69; Pages 263-269

    Goldberg, Green, & Sander - “ADR Problems and Prospects: Looking to the Future” Judicature: Volume 69; Pages 291-299

March 15th - Examination #2
16. March 20th - Criminal Procedure
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 9
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 13.2

   Wordon - “Policymaking by Prosecutors: The Uses of Discretion in Regulating Plea
   Bargaining” Judicature: Volume 73; Pages 335-340

17. March 22nd - Criminal Trials
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 10
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 13.1, 13.2

18. March 27th - Civil Process
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 11

19. March 29th - Trial Courts
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 12
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 9.1

20. April 3rd - SCOTUS Case Selection
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 4
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: Chapter 13 (624-629), 13.5

21. April 5th - Supreme Court Decision-Making (Law)
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: Chapter 10 (438-449); 10.1, 10.2, 10.7, Chapter 11
   (491-501), 11.1, 11.8

22. April 10th - Supreme Court Decision-Making (Attitudes)
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 13
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 10.5, 10.6, 10.8

23. April 12th - Supreme Court Decision-Making (Rational Choice)
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 13
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 13.4, 13.7

24. April 17th - Supreme Court Decision-Making (Public Opinion)
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 7
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 2.4, 2.5, 13.4

25. April 19th - Impact
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 14
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 14.1-14.4, 14.7

26. April 24th - Impact
   Carp, Stidham, & Manning: Chapter 15
   Murphy, Pritchett, Epstein, & Knight: 14.5, 14.6

27. April 26th - Conclusion & Review

April 30th - Final Examination 3:00-5:00 pm