I. Introduction:

This is a graduate level course intended to familiarize students with questions, approaches and issues involved in the study of state court systems, including the politics and policy associated with these institutions. Our concerns during the semester will be far ranging, beginning with an introduction to state courts, we will proceed to the forces affecting the selection of judges to state courts, the institutions affecting judicial decision making, and an evaluation of policies affected by state courts. Throughout the semester our attention will largely be directed toward state courts of last resort to understand the factors affecting state appellate courts. As institutions, state supreme courts provide an informative area of public law that differs greatly from studies of the federal courts.

A major advantage of studying courts in the states is the leverage one can gain on important theoretical questions that are central to the study of law and politics, not just state politics. At its best, the states offer the opportunity to ascertain with clarity the impact of such things as political and social context, public opinion, and institutional design on political and legal outcomes. Studies of the state courts offer answers to questions that may elude most other subfields in political science as they benefit from unique and important differences across the states. While single nation and single court studies make inferences from very limited quantities of data and observations, studies of state courts avoid the vexing problem of few comparative opportunities and allow a rich source of cross-state and institutional evaluation.

II. Required Text:

There are four books required for this course, which are available for purchase at the University Bookstore or through an on-line bookseller. If purchasing on-line, please use expedited shipping as readings will begin very quickly. Additionally, there are prepared readings available through the university library’s reserve service. We will use readings from this collection immediately.

5. Prepared Readings on Blackboard. To access Blackboard, log in with your UTA NetID and password at https://elearn.uta.edu/webapps/login/. If you experience difficulty when accessing
III. Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and Participation – Attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to attend each class and to arrive on time prepared to discuss the current week's readings. Class participation should reflect careful thinking about the readings. Each student will be assigned readings during several weeks of the semester; whereby, students will be responsible for discussing the articles for that week as an in-class leader for the discussion of the readings. While all students are expected to complete the readings and to be prepared to discuss the week’s readings, participation as the readings leader will provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their broader command of the week’s subject. As noted in the schedule, some of the articles are posted on Blackboard. Lastly, personal computers or tablets are not permitted in class. While the benefits of laptops and tablets are numerous, they generally are a distraction during seminars.

2. Topic papers – Each student is required to write three full-length double-spaced four-page papers. Papers will be assigned on Tuesday, August 26th with students assigned readings for a particular week. Each paper should comment on the readings for the week, describing the primary arguments, hypotheses, and summary conclusions of the different articles and/or books that are assigned. Higher level analysis, an expectation for this course, will synthesize the readings and their key points, comparing the different readings in respect to each other. Weekly papers are due at the beginning of class. Late weekly papers will not be accepted.

3. Research Paper – Each student is required to write a semester research paper related to one of the themes of the course (e.g., judicial selection, money in state court elections, judicial behavior, etc.). Research should be independent and include the general components of a research design, including a research question, literature review, and several well-stated and theoretically sound hypotheses. Further, introductory quantitative analysis is expected as a component of the paper, meaning the use of data and state-level datasets to test theoretical assumptions using descriptive statistics and perhaps causal statistics (i.e., chi-squared test). A single-spaced one-page research prospectus that describes the specific research question, several primary hypotheses, relevant non-class literature, the source of the data, and the justification for the topic is due on October 7th. Failure to turn in the prospectus will result in a two-grade penalty (20 points) on the final paper grade. Completed papers are due on November 21st at 7PM and will be uploaded to Blackboard. Late papers will not be accepted.

4. Examinations – There will be one final examination that will include two broad essay questions. Completed exams will then be uploaded to the final exam page within Blackboard. All students will take the examination at the assigned time with no make-up exam allowed except for situations such as medical emergencies, deaths in the family, etc. In such situations, students are expected to contact the instructor no later than the day of the exam and will be required to present proof in the case of a medical emergency. Failure to take an examination will result in a failing grade (0) for the examination.

IV. Grading:

1. Attendance and Participation – 20%
2. Topic Papers – 20%
3. Research Paper – 30%
   a. Prospectus Due on October 3
   b. Final Research Paper Due on November 21
4. Final Examination – 30%
The grading scale is as follows:

- 90-100  A
- 80-89   B
- 70-79   C
- 60-69   D
- 0-59    F

Policy on incomplete grades (I’s): Given an incomplete grade can be a permanent grade assignment, incompletes are strongly avoided. An incomplete grade will be assigned only in the most extreme cases of sickness that occur after the university’s withdrawal deadline.

V. Class Schedule:

Week 1:  August 26
  **Introduction to State Judicial Politics**

Week 2:  September 2
  **Controversies with State Judicial Selection**

Week 3:  September 9
  **Judicial Independence and Accountability**

Week 4:  September 16
  **Voting and Political Competition in State Judicial Elections**
  Melinda Gann Hall and Chris Bonneau, 2013, “Attack Advertising, the White Decision, and Voter Participation in State Supreme Court Elections”, http://prq.sagepub.com/content/66/1/115.abstract

Week 5: September 23

**Money in State Court Races**

Week 6: September 30

**The Legitimacy of State Courts**

**Research Prospectus Due: October 7**

Week 7: October 7

**Judicial Characteristics**

Week 8: October 14

**State Court Agendas and the Consensual Norms of Courts**

Week 9: October 21
**Representation of Constituents**

Week 10: October 28
**Litigation Patterns and Attention to State Courts**

Week 11: November 4
**Class Canceled for Research Paper**

Week 12: November 11
**Qualitative Descriptions of State Courts**

Week 13 November 18
**Policymaking in State Courts**


Research Paper Due: November 25

Week 14    November 25
Class Canceled for Exam Preparation

Week 15    December 2
Final Exam Discussion

Final Examination: Tuesday, December 9, 8:15-10:45PM

VI. A Note on the Readings

From time to time, the website links in the schedule will change or stop working. Please remember that publication links are provided as a courtesy. Each of these articles can be found through online databases managed by the university, including JSTOR, the Worldwide Political Science Abstracts, or Academic Search Complete. If you have questions about searching for an article or would like a tutorial on database research, please contact the university library. The library’s liaison to the Department of Political Science is Gretchen Trkay (gtrkay@uta.edu).

Remember that links often work best when physically at the university. Otherwise, I advise using an off-campus connection that utilizes a virtual private network (VPN), which makes off-campus downloads easier. VPN software can be downloaded through UTA’s Office of Information Technology (see http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/software/vpn/index.php).

VII. Special Notes:

1. Correspondence – Occasionally, students may be contacted about course changes and other events. Correspondence will be directed to university email addresses, rather than personal email addresses which is not permitted by the university. Failure by a student to check their university email may result in missing assignments and grade penalties (e.g., weekly paper discussion and assignments).

2. Cell Phones – Students are requested to turn off their cell phones prior to class. If a cell phone rings during class, that student is expected to leave class for the remainder of the period.

3. Academic Integrity - All students are expected to obey the civil and penal statutes of the State of Texas and the United States, the Regents’ Rules and Regulations of The University of
Texas System, the rules and regulations of the University, and the orders or instructions issued by an administrative official of the University or U.T. System in the course of his/her duties, and to observe standards of conduct that are compatible with the University’s function as an educational institution. Any student found to engage in cheating, plagiarism, or collusion will be sanctioned.

4. Inclement Weather – If a class is canceled due to inclement weather, its subject will be delayed until the following class. Similarly, all tests and assignments canceled because of inclement weather will be delivered during the following class. For information related to weather related class cancellations please call (972) 601-2049.

5. Students with Disabilities - Any student with a documented disability needing academic accommodations is requested to speak with the instructor during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential.

6. Diversity Policy – It is the policy of the University of Texas at Arlington that, to the extent provided by applicable laws, no person shall be denied employment or admission, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or subject to discrimination under, any program or activity which it sponsors or conducts on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, disabilities, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

7. Syllabus Changes – The instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus at any time during the semester.