The Supreme Court's 2015 Term
Political Science 601
Spring 2016
W 8:30-10:30
Grainger 2195

Professor Information:

Professor Ryan Owens
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 10:30-11:30.

Class Description: The goal of this class is to immerse you in a sample of the Court’s cases this term. We will read the briefs parties file with the Court, cases and statutes they cite, and listen to oral argument in these cases. If the Court decides the case before the conclusion of the semester, we will read the case and discuss it. At the conclusion of the semester, we will all be experts on some of the Court’s most interesting cases of the term.

Requirements and Grades: Before each class, we will read some type of court decision or brief. I expect you to read them and to able to discuss them in class. I will include these briefs on the course website at Learn at UW. Should you like to find these briefs yourselves, go to scotusblog.com, oyez.com, the Supreme Court’s website, or the American Bar Association: (http://www.americanbar.org/publications/preview_home/alphabetical.html ).

When we listen to oral argument, I expect you to pay careful attention. We will discuss the questions and answers thr oughout the oral argument.

Class Participation, I expect you to come prepared to all classes. This means that you have read the material assigned and can discuss it. I interact with my classes and expect students to be present and able to talk about the reading material for the day’s class. Unprepared classes are boring to teach and boring to sit through. So please come prepared. If discussion becomes lopsided, with only a few people speaking, I will randomly call on people.

Final Oral Argument Presentation. On our last day of class, you will present oral arguments or sit as a justice in the state supreme court chambers. We will hold oral argument in two cases: Taylor v. United States (14-6166) and Herffernan v. City of Paterson (14-1280). I will

1 Whether, in a federal criminal prosecution under the Hobbs Act, 18 U.S.C. § 1951, the government is relieved of proving beyond a reasonable doubt the interstate commerce element by relying exclusively on evidence that the robbery or attempted robbery of a drug dealer is an inherent economic enterprise that satisfies, as a matter of law, the interstate commerce element of the offense.
randomly divide you into two groups of ten. For each group, six of you will sit as justices; two of you will be petitioner's attorneys; and two of you will be respondent's attorneys. Oral argument will last 30 minutes per groups (15 minutes for each side). You will be graded on how prepared you are. This means that you will have read the relevant precedents, can discuss them, and can discuss other aspects of the case that may matter (i.e., policy implications). This is equally true for attorneys and justices. (I will randomly choose the Chief.)

**Grade Scale.** I will base your grade on class participation (50%) and a final presentation (50%). The grade scale is as follows:

- 93-100 (A)
- 88-92 (AB)
- 83-87 (B)
- 78-82 (BC)
- 70-77 (C)
- 60-69 (D)
- < 60 (Fail)

**Class Behavior.** We all want to learn while in class, so do not speak out of turn or otherwise cause disruptions in class. Be respectful to your fellow students. If you fail to do so, university guidelines require me to take action. For more information, please see http://www.students.wisc.edu/rights/. Bottom line, I want you to talk in class—but not while I'm talking.

**Laptops.** I do not allow laptops in class. They (and cell phones) are distracting to other students and entice you to read non-class related material during lecture. If you have a documented medical need that requires you to use a laptop, let me know. Otherwise, please put them away. Failure to do so amounts to a disruption.

**Academic Integrity.** I hold all students to the university’s academic integrity standards. For more information on those, please see: http://students.wisc.edu/saja/integrity.html.

**Students Requiring Need-Based Accommodations.** Students who need accommodations on the basis of disability should schedule an office appointment with me within the first three weeks of the semester. Please schedule this office appointment by email. To maintain the confidentiality of your request, please do not approach me before or after class to discuss your accommodation needs. The McBurney Disability Resource Center (263-2741) provides resources for students with disabilities (http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/). You will need to provide documentation of disability to them in order to receive official university services and accommodations. Do not wait until before an exam to contact me about this matter, as I will be unable to assist you.

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2 Whether the First Amendment bars the government from demoting a public employee based on a supervisor's perception that the employee supports a political candidate.
Schedule

**Occasionally, the Court dismisses cases that it has granted, which means that some cases on our schedule may have to be moved around a bit.**

January 20: Introduction and discuss of class.

*Fisher v. University of Texas (14-981)*

January 27: Read briefs and cases
February 3: Oral argument

*Evenwal v. Abbott (14-940)*

February 10: Read briefs and cases
February 17: Oral argument

*Bank Markazi v. Peterson (14-770)*

February 24: Read briefs and cases
March 2: Oral argument

*Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association (14-915)*

March 9: Read briefs and cases
March 16: Oral argument

*Zubik v. Burwell (14-1418)*

March 30: Read briefs and cases
April 6: Oral argument

*Birchfield v. North Dakota (14-1468)*

April 13: Oral argument only

*United States v. TX (15-674)*

April 20: Read briefs and cases
April 27: Oral argument

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May 4: FINAL ORAL ARGUMENT PRESENTATIONS