The Judiciary in American Politics

Using Active Learning Strategies to Engage Students in Learning about the U.S. Court System

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Public Knowledge about the Courts

- Americans are relatively uninformed about the courts

- Americans see the courts, particularly the US Supreme Court, as political

- Favorability ratings have reached a record low

Teaching the Judiciary in American Politics

- Considering the judiciary along with case-related discussions
- Courts as political institutions

What is Active Learning?

- There are many definitions
- Key components:
  - Students are active instead of passive
  - Students are "doing"—not watching, listening or taking notes

Active Learning Strategies

- Most strategies involve some group component
- Students do best when they are given specific roles
- In most cases, setting a time-limit on group activities is crucial
- Assign students to groups when possible
- Benefits extend beyond active learning activities

Choose a Justice/Judge

- Time: varies—could incorporate in lecture/discussion or be a separate simulation
- Could utilize US Courts website and resources
  - http://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/nomination-process
  - http://www.fjc.gov/history/home.nsf/page/judges.html

Jury Simulation

- Uses Frontline's "Inside the Jury Room"
- Group Activity
- Time: about one class period

Supreme Court Mini-Simulation

- Individual or Group Activity

- Time: single- or multi-class period

- Could use case currently on USSC docket

- Could use pre-packaged version from US Courts