

Network Derived Educational Visualizations of the Work of the United States Supreme Court

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POSTER ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

The resignation of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the death of Chief Justice William Rehnquist, and the appointment and confirmation of their successors have prompted the popular press to publish numerous charts and graphs illuminating various aspects of the work of the United States Supreme Court. Many of these charts and graphs attempt to portray the ideological landscape of the current members of the Court and to demonstrate the important swing vote status of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. Both of these themes may be more rigorously and expressly conveyed using network graphing and other information visualization techniques.

Also, several recent scholarly articles have appeared that use network science techniques to analyze the citation patterns of the Supreme Court (Chandler 2005; Fowler & Jeon 2005; Smith 2005). While comprehensive and insightful, these studies do not focus on creating visualizations that have the potential to enhance the public's understanding of the work of the Court or to be used in classroom settings to teach law and political science students.

The visualizations included in this poster are: (1) a spatial layout of the justices based on their level of agreement in non-unanimous cases over the past ten years, (2) visual representations of the complex joining patterns of the justices in main opinions, concurrences, and dissents illustrated by a specific case from the 2004 term, (3) the topic space covered by the court for the 2004 term based on West topic assignments, and (4) a network layout of legal topics based on West's Topics by Specialty (West 2005).

References:

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