Peter Hook

Final Abstract for the Presentation

(Note: While initially hoping to exhibit a poster in addition to my talk, this is no longer possible by next week. I mentioned this to Howard in the hallway and he indicated that this would be O.K. So, I will only be giving a talk and not exhibiting a poster.)

**Instructional Visualizations of the Work of the United States Supreme Court**

The resignation of Justice Sandra Day O’Connor and the death of Chief Justice William Rehnquist 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.

Recently, several 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 little in the way of 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.

Specific visualizations in this presentation will include: (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 specific cases from the past term, (3) the topic space covered by the court over the past term based on West topic assignments with an initial comparison to previous years, and (4) a visual comparison of the wildly divergent summaries of key holdings of the law for each opinion as provided by two rival publishers of online case materials (Lexis and Westlaw). Data for these visualizations was collected from the Lexis and Westlaw databases and represented using a complex relational database. Additional data for this presentation was taken from the yearly statistical survey of the Supreme Court published by the staff of the Harvard Law Review (Harvard Law Review 1 & 2, 2004).

References:


