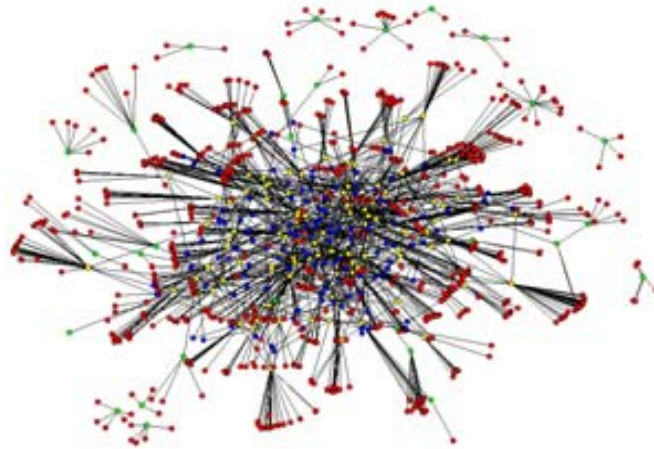


Four-Campus Video-Conference Series, F-W-S 2006-7 Human Sciences and Complexity



October 27: Friday, 1:30-3:00 from UCSD

James Fowler (Political Science, UCSD)

"Supreme Court Networks of Precedents"

<http://polisci.ucsd.edu/faculty/fowler.htm> (live link in pdf)

Abstract: We construct the complete network of 28,951 majority opinions written by the U.S. Supreme Court from 1792 to 2005. Data from this network demonstrates quantitatively the evolution of the norm of *stare decisis* in the 19th Century and a significant deviation from this norm by the activist Warren court. We further describe a method for creating authority scores using the network data to identify the most important Court precedents. This method yields rankings that conform closely to evaluations by legal experts, and even predicts which cases they will identify as important in the future. An analysis of these scores over time allows us to test several hypotheses about the rise and fall of precedent. We show that reversed cases tend to be much more important than other decisions, and the cases that overrule them quickly become and remain even more important as the reversed decisions decline. We also show that the Court is careful to ground overruling decisions in past precedent, and the care it exercises is increasing in the importance of the decision that is overruled. Finally, authority scores corroborate qualitative assessments of which issues and cases the Court prioritizes and how these change over time.

Video Conference Locations for Participants

UCSD: 260 Galbraith Hall – Mary Gibsen mgibsen@ucsd.edu 858 534-8265

UCR: A139 Olmsted Hall - Mike Capriotti mcap@ucr.edu 951 827-3045

UCI: 122 Social Science Tower – Jeffrey.Fisher@uci.edu 949 824-7581

UCLA: 285 Powell Library – Don Roby vidcon@ucla.edu 310 206-7449