

NJC Courses

Handling Capital Cases (JS 623)

Why should I take this course?

Death is different. You feel it the moment you enter a courtroom when a capital case is beginning. Even if you have experience handling major criminal cases, if you are not experienced in hearing capital cases, you may find yourself lost in the seemingly endless array of motions, hearings, and appeals that are unique to capital cases. The burden on the criminal process is heavy and the usual rules often have limited use in capital cases. As the guardian of both the defendant's rights and the community's resources, judges will be better able to accomplish these goals after attending this course.

What will I learn?

After this course, participants will be able to:

- Summarize the trends in recent U.S. Supreme Court capital cases.
- Ensure that a jury has been properly "death qualified" through *voir dire*.
- Handle the penalty phase and sentencing efficiently after analyzing what constitutes aggravating and mitigating circumstances.
- Ensure that responses to the media are appropriate and well conceived.
- Rule effectively on post-trial motions.

Who should attend?

This course is designed for judges with general jurisdiction or criminal felony sentencing responsibilities, judges who may sit in capital cases, or trial judges from states that are contemplating death penalty legislation.

Who are the members of the faculty?

The faculty team possesses a great depth of experience in handling capital cases and comprises judges from four different death penalty states. Law professors also provide insights into these cases from their vantage points.

How is this course taught?

This course will integrate lecture and large group discussion. Small discussion groups focus on practical courtroom applications of the class topics.

Does this course qualify for credits in the Judicial Studies degree program?

This course qualifies for two credits in the Judicial Studies degree program upon successful completion of the course and the course exam. In addition, this course qualifies for the Certificate in Judicial Development General Jurisdiction Trial Skills programs.

What should I tell my presiding judge or funding agency so that my attendance will be approved?

The quality of justice and due process of law in capital cases is once again under scrutiny. Judges are the linchpin in the process and their knowledge and effectiveness must be extraordinary in all aspects of these complex cases. This course will prepare judges on a substantive law basis and provide them with the practical skills they need to effectively manage death penalty trials.

Whom should I contact for more information?

For more information, please contact the registrar's office at (800) 255-8343 or registrar@judges.org.



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