

Getting a glimpse inside the Supreme Court

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Wall Street Journal reporter Jess Bravin speaks during a full-house presentation at Tulane Law School on Sept. 19. (Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer)

Do you have special insight into the Supreme Court justices' personalities? Do you expect them to allow videotaping of their oral arguments soon? Oh, and would you report about a justice's abortion or affair with a reporter?

The Supreme Court doesn't get easy questions, and neither did *Wall Street Journal* reporter Jess Bravin during a full-house presentation at Tulane Law School on Sept. 19.

[Amy Gajda](#), a former TV journalist who is now an associate professor of law at Tulane University, quizzed Bravin about privacy considerations and court secrecy, while students asked about the personal interplay on an ideologically divided court, and the tension between speed and accuracy in reporting highly anticipated rulings.

“They don’t go play baseball together,” Bravin quipped about the nine justices.

But they do “like to have fake trials for fun,” he said, such as when Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg dressed in “an F Troop uniform” for a mock trial of Gen. George Custer and Justice Anthony Kennedy recruited actor Mel Gibson for a trial of Hamlet.

Because the justices don’t like to discuss their work with the news media, Bravin said he tries to find other ways of illuminating them. That made it “almost like found art” when he stumbled across C-SPAN footage from a book party for Justice Clarence Thomas, with justices and other Washington dignitaries engaged in small talk.

Bravin said that reporting on such personal details as an affair or abortion would depend on how the information was obtained and its relevance to the public interest. And “the decision would be made at the highest level of the news organization.”

With a new term set to start Oct. 6, what’s the biggest upcoming case? The court is widely expected to take up same-sex marriage again.

“That will overshadow all the other stuff that’s there,” Bravin said.

Linda P. Campbell is Tulane Law School’s director of communications.

“The main thing that the Supreme Court press corps can do to benefit the public now ... is to find the real issues of the people behind these cases.”