

Who Should Take Environmental Courses at Stanford Law School?

Courses in the Environmental and Natural Resources Law & Policy Program (ENRLP) are designed for students planning to practice environmental law and for those interested in addressing public policy issues, understanding the water and energy systems, developing climate law and policy, and building more sustainable businesses.

The Law School offers an array of core, clinical, advanced, and policy courses. We have provided the following list of our offerings this year to help you design a curriculum to fit your interests and professional goals. We encourage students from related disciplines to enroll. The Law School also offers several exciting joint graduate programs in connection with the Doerr School (E-IPER), the Business School, and others. For more guidance, contact Molly Melius, ENRLP Program Manager (loughney@stanford.edu).

Courses

The following courses relate to key topics of environmental regulation. Students need no special background to enroll in any of the core courses. Note Administrative Law is not a core course for the LLM curriculum and is not a pre-requisite for any environmental courses, but it is helpful if you are interested in practicing environmental law.

Administrative Law | Autumn, Winter | [Course Link](#) for Autumn | [Course Link](#) for Winter

Law made by administrative agencies dominates the modern legal system and modern legal practice. This course examines the legal and practical foundations of the modern administrative state. Topics include rationales for delegation to administrative agencies; the legal framework (both constitutional and statutory) that governs agency decision-making; the proper role of agencies in interpreting statutory and regulatory law; and judicial review of agency action. The course will cover these topics through a combination of cases and examples drawn primarily from separation of powers doctrine; the constitutional law of due process; health, safety, and environmental policy; criminal justice; national security law; and agency use of new algorithmic governance tools.

Business of Water | Spring | [Course Link](#)

Freshwater is our most crucial natural resource, but it is facing mounting pressures from climate change and other factors. While public agencies traditionally dominated water management, private water companies are playing an increasingly important (and sometime controversial) role. In many cases, private companies are making critical contributions to meeting societal water needs (e.g., by developing

new technologies and finding new ways to reduce water use). In other cases, however, the involvement of private companies has proven controversial (e.g., when private companies have taken over public water supply systems in developing countries such as Bolivia). This course will look at established and emerging businesses in the water sector and the legal, economic, and social issues generated by the private sector's involvement. These businesses include water technology companies (e.g., companies commercializing new desalination or water recycling technologies), venture capitalists, water funds (that directly buy and sell water rights), consulting firms, innovative agricultural companies, and large corporations (that increasingly are adopting corporate stewardship programs). The course will begin with two weeks of introduction to water and the private water sector. After that, each class will focus on a different water company. Company executives will attend each class session and discuss their business with the class. In most classes, we will examine (1) the viability and efficacy of the company's business plan, (2) the legal and/or social issues arising from the business' work, and (3) how the business might contribute to improved water management and policy.

California Coast: Science, Policy and Law | Spring | [Course Link](#)

This interdisciplinary course integrates the legal, scientific, and policy dimensions of how we characterize and manage resource use and allocation along the California coast. We will use this geographic setting as the vehicle for exploring more generally how agencies, legislatures, and courts resolve resource-use conflicts and the role that scientific information and uncertainty play in the process. Our focus will be on the land-sea interface as we explore contemporary coastal land-use and marine resource decision-making, including coastal pollution, public health, ecosystem management; public access; private development; local community and state infrastructure; natural systems and significant threats; resource extraction; and conservation, mitigation and restoration. Students will learn the fundamental physics, chemistry, and biology of the coastal zone, tools for exploring data collected in the coastal ocean, and the institutional framework that shapes public and private decisions affecting coastal resources. Cross-listed with Civil & Environmental Engineering (CEE 175A/275A).

Climate Law and Policy | Spring | [Course Link](#)

Climate change presents an enormous challenge for the environment, our economy, and U.S. legal and policy norms. This interdisciplinary, graduate-level course, surveys the legal, socio-economic, and political implications of climate change. After a brief introduction to climate science, the course dives into the wide range of legal and policy approaches for addressing climate change, including decarbonization incentives and mandates, carbon accounting and disclosure obligations and practices, energy infrastructure needs, and climate adaptation and resilience strategies. Differing stakeholder perspectives will provide a focal point for analyzing rising tensions between federal and state climate-related laws and policies; corporate legal responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions; barriers of entry for clean energy and clean tech companies, and the interests of communities that have borne the brunt of legacy pollution. The class will focus primarily on U.S. law and policy as influenced by international climate frameworks and emerging procurement and trade-based practices.

Designing Startups for Good | Spring | [Course Link \(forthcoming\)](#)

This course examines the limitations of traditional corporate structures—particularly the mandate for shareholder profit maximization—which often lead to unsustainable growth and the externalization of social and environmental costs. Students will investigate alternative legal and financial models that support sustainability, such as Public Benefit Corporations, blended finance approaches, and governance tools that prioritize mission in addition to profit. The course emphasizes the need for legal frameworks, funding models, and compensation structures that allow companies to define their stakeholders and pursue positive impact on their behalf.

Students will engage in research, strategic development, and practical drafting to support mission-driven startups. Deliverables include governance guidance, legal templates for “mission lock” mechanisms, educational tools for founders, and financial roadmaps for aligned capital structures. Through lectures, guest speakers, and project-based work, students will prepare written work and final presentations aimed at furthering sustainable enterprises.

Previous exposure to startups, corporate law, and venture investment is preferred but not required. The course is open to law students and to graduate students in the fields of environmental science and sustainability, public policy, and business.

Energy Law | Winter | [Course Link](#)

Description forthcoming, but this course will be an introduction to U.S. energy law.

Environmental Justice | Spring | [Course Link](#)

This course will introduce environmental justice as a social movement, including its central substantive concerns (the needs of humans in the built environment rather than the need to protect the environment from humans) and its methods (community-based political organizing rather than professionalized judicial or legislative action). The bulk of the course will then pursue a broader conception of environmental justice today by using social science research, theory, and case studies to investigate the civil rights and poverty aspects of environmental safety and natural resources. The course will include units on: (1) toxic exposure and public health disparities stemming from the disproportionate siting of locally-unwanted land uses in poor neighborhoods of color; (2) access to natural resources and basic public services, including clean water, wastewater disposal, and open space; (3) tools in environmental justice advocacy (including community-based lawyering, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Fair Housing Act, common law nuisance actions, and transactional lawyering); (4) environmental justice issues in Indian Country, and (5) environmental justice issues in climate change policy. Much of the course material will be grounded in the experiences and advocacy histories of specific communities, both urban and rural, across the country.

Environmental Law and Policy | Autumn | [Course Link](#)

Environmental law is critically important, endlessly fascinating, and highly intertwined with many of today's top legal and policy challenges, including addressing legacy pollution, climate change, siting and

permitting energy and other large infrastructure projects, and the sustainable management of our natural resources. This interdisciplinary, graduate-level course will provide a survey of major federal and state environmental laws and policies, including how they are structured, implemented, and enforced; how they intersect with adjacent administrative, constitutional and other statutory frameworks; how effectively they address today's top environment challenges; and how different governmental branches, regulated industry, non-profit advocacy groups, and private citizens have shaped—and continue to shape—U.S. environmental law and policy.

[Environmental Law and Policy Colloquium](#) | Autumn, Spring | [Course Link](#)

This colloquium offers LLM students the opportunity to discuss cutting-edge legal topics related to, among others, the environment, natural resources management, or energy policy.

[Local Government Law](#) | Autumn | [Course Link](#)

This course will examine the source, scope and limits of local government power. It will consider the relationship of local governments to state and federal government and of the relationship of local governments to the individuals and communities within and around them. Specific themes will include the potential of local governments to be responsive democratic communities, the potential of local governments to become isolated or exclusive enclaves, and the effect of local governments on the metropolitan political economy. The course will examine state and federal doctrine that affects local government, political/ social theory and urban planning/ development literature.

[Problem Solving and Decision Making for Public Policy and Social Change](#) | Autumn | [Course Link](#)

Stanford graduates will play important roles in solving many of today's and tomorrow's major societal problems—in areas such as education, health, energy, and domestic and global poverty—that call for actions by nonprofit, business, and hybrid organizations as well as governments. This course teaches skills and bodies of knowledge relevant to these roles, covering topics such as designing, implementing, and evaluating social strategies; systems thinking; psychological biases that adversely affect people's decisions; and approaches to influencing behavior. Most of the course will be devoted to students working in teams to apply these concepts and tools to a problem of their choice. The course may be of interest to students in Law and Policy Lab practicums who wish to broaden their policy analysis skills.

[Startup Law: Sustainability](#) | Autumn, Winter | [Course Link](#)

This course offers an opportunity to study the history, legal structure, and financial incentives of the startup economy while getting hands-on experience advising clients: Stanford founders building sustainability startups. The curriculum has three pillars: lectures and guest lectures outlining fundamental concepts and topics (including examining the role that startups can play in climate solutions), a simulation in which all students will represent "Model Corporation" throughout its early life cycle, and advisory work on actual startup client matters. For the client work, students will perform client intake, draft an initial scope of work, complete due diligence and make supplemental due

diligence requests, make any necessary adjustments to scope of work, and ultimately deliver work product in the format most appropriate & valuable for the particular matter (typically drafted contracts related to formation, fundraising, and stakeholder involvement). Because of the nature of the client relationship, the course relies on students' hard work, flexibility, and commitment to keeping pace with the material and assignments. The class will meet for two class sessions per week, plus additional client meetings.

State and Local Climate Law | Winter | [Course Link](#)

State and local governments in the U.S. are critical actors and innovators in a new generation of law and policy to confront the climate crisis. Their role is much more significant than as second-best substitutes where international and federal politics are slow or erratic. As regulators, planners, service providers, property owners, conveners, and more, state and local governments hold their own zones of opportunity and legal authority. This course will consider state and local potential in terms of mitigation (to help decarbonize our energy systems and reduce greenhouse gas emissions), including through electricity and gas provision; energy efficiency in buildings; cars, land-use planning, and transportation; and direct regulation of fossil fuel extraction. A second unit of the course will focus on infrastructure and other adaptation efforts related to escalating risks of wildfire, heat, drought, floods, and coastal land loss. A third unit focused on loss and damage will cover the aftermath of climate-related disasters, including the state and local role in decontamination, clean-up, and reconstruction, as well as in insurance and other compensation systems for managing loss of life, property destruction, economic losses, and reconstruction. Our syllabus will minimize overlap with Climate Law & Policy (LAW 2520) (including by mostly skipping California's cap-and-trade program), so students are encouraged to take both courses. The course will feature several guest lectures by lawmakers and scholars who are leaders in subnational climate action. There are no mandatory prerequisites, though students who have some familiarity with either local government law or climate law/policy will find themselves more quickly at home with the readings and material.

Water Law | Autumn | [Course Link](#)

This course will study how society allocates and protects its most crucial natural resource—water. The emphasis will be on current legal and policy debates, although we will also examine the history of water development and politics. The course will focus on United States law and policy, but insights from the course are applicable to water regimes throughout the world, and we will occasionally look at law and policy elsewhere in the world for comparison. Among the many issues that we will consider are: how to allocate water during periods of scarcity (particularly as climate change leads to more extremes); alternative means of responding to the world's growing demands for water (including active conservation); the appropriate role for the market and private companies in meeting society's water needs; protection of threatened groundwater resources; environmental limits on water development (including the U.S. Endangered Species Act and the "public trust" doctrine); constitutional issues in water governance; the human right to water; Native American water rights; protection of water quality; challenges to the substantive reform of existing water law; and interstate and international disputes over water.

Policy Practicum

Policy Practicum provide opportunities (interdisciplinary, when possible) for students to learn by doing policy analysis or regulatory drafting for policymakers. The practicum are typically scheduled shortly before the quarter begins.

Species & Ecosystem Preservation | Spring | [Course Link](#)

Global climate change is significantly reducing biodiversity. Some biologists estimate that 35% of animals and plants could become extinct in the wild by 2050 due to global climate change. Climate change is having a profound effect on ecosystem and species distribution and sustainability up and down the west coast. The effects are not uniform, nor are they completely projectable. But, they are expected to be long-lasting, and in many instances functionally irreversible.

This course will survey federal and state policy and legal tools needed to coordinate efforts for effective interventions. Agencies may lack data necessary to identify and evaluate policy needs and goals for managing the impacts of climate change. The course will principally address possible actions in the western states and British Columbia. Research teams will evaluate possible innovations in law and regulations, organization, and institutions, as well as technology and information systems. The goal is to help build a coordinated public policy system that will support and enhance long-term species and ecosystem sustainability.

Environmental Law Clinic

There are no prerequisites for enrolling in a clinic, but students do need to go through the Mills Legal Clinic application process in the spring/summer for the following year.

The Environmental Law Clinic is operating full-time this winter with advanced clinic opportunities each quarter. Clinic provides an opportunity each quarter for students to represent national, regional, and grassroots non-profit organizations on a variety of environmental issues. The clinic's primary goal is to help students develop essential lawyering skills through hands-on experience in real cases. Clinic students work on a mix of litigation and policy matters at the interface of law, science, and policy. The cases take students before administrative agencies and to all levels of state and federal court, with frequent practice in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and the U.S. Supreme Court. Students help screen new matters and potential clients; formulate strategies; research and develop factual and legal issues; and prosecute administrative and litigation proceedings. Students may meet with clients, opposing counsel or agency officials; review administrative records and develop expert testimony; draft comment letters, petitions, pleadings and briefs; and present argument at administrative and judicial hearings. In regular one-on-one meetings with supervising faculty, there is a heavy emphasis on learning how to write persuasively, present oral arguments, and exercise professional judgment. Students who have already successfully completed the basic Environmental Law Clinic for one quarter may continue to work with the clinic in the advanced section, participating in a more intensive and senior capacity on clinic matters.

In the 2026–2027 academic year, we hope to offer: Administrative Law; Advanced Legal Writing; Public Interest Litigation; Animal Law; The Business of Water; Climate Law and Policy; Energy Law; Environmental Law Clinic; Environmental Law and Policy; Land Use, Local Government Law, Natural Resources Law; Public Lands Law; State and Local Climate Law; and Startup Law: Sustainability.

Please see the [ENRLP website](#) for more details on these courses.

AUTUMN 2025 COURSE GRID

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas /Sanders</i>	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas /Sanders</i>	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas /Sanders</i>	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas /Sanders</i>
9:30-11:00	Problem Solving and Decision Making <i>Brest</i>	Water Law <i>Thompson</i>	Problem Solving and Decision Making <i>Brest</i>	Water Law <i>Thompson</i>	
11:10-12:40	Administrative Law <i>O'Connell</i> [11:10-12:30] Local Government Law <i>Ford</i>	Administrative Law <i>O'Connell</i> [11:10-12:30] Startup Law: Sustainability <i>McClure/Melius</i>	Administrative Law <i>O'Connell</i> [11:10-12:30] Local Government Law <i>Ford</i>	Startup Law: Sustainability <i>McClure/Melius</i>	
2:15-3:45		Environmental Law and Policy <i>Hayes</i>		Environmental Law and Policy <i>Hayes</i>	
4:15-6:15		Environmental Law and Policy Colloquium <i>Hamilton</i> [LLMs only]			

WINTER 2026 COURSE GRID

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>	Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>	Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>	Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>	Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>
	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>
9:30-10:50	Administrative Law <i>D. Engstrom</i>		Administrative Law <i>D. Engstrom</i>		
11:10-12:40	State and Local Climate Law <i>Anderson</i>	Startup Law: Sustainability <i>McClure/Melius</i>	State and Local Climate Law <i>Anderson</i>	Startup Law: Sustainability <i>McClure/Melius</i>	
2:15-3:45	Energy Law <i>Gergen</i>		Energy Law <i>Gergen</i>		
4:15-6:15					

- Policy Lab: TBD

SPRING 2026 COURSE GRID

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>	Adv. Env. Law Clinic <i>Sivas/Sanders</i>
9:30-11:00		Climate Law and Policy <i>Hayes</i>		Climate Law and Policy <i>Hayes</i>	
11:10-12:40	California Coast: Science, Policy, and Law <i>Boehm/Sivas</i>		California Coast: Science, Policy, and Law <i>Boehm/Sivas</i>		
2:15-3:45	Advanced Administrative Law <i>O'Connell</i>		Advanced Administrative Law <i>O'Connell</i>		
4:15-6:15	Designing Startups for Good <i>McClure/Melius</i> [Tentative]	Environmental Justice <i>Anderson</i> The Business of Water <i>Thompson</i>	Environmental Law & Policy Colloquium <i>White</i> (LLMs only)	Environmental Justice <i>Anderson</i>	

- Policy Lab: Species & Ecosystem Preservation (*Sivas*)