

Columbia University School of Professional Studies

Master of Science in Sustainability Management

Environmental Law and Policy in New York City

Schedule

Dates: Room: 316 Hamilton Hall

Credits

Elective

Contact Information

Instructor: Laura J. Popa, Lecturer in Professional Studies

Email ljp2170@columbia.edu

Office Hours By appointment.

Response Students should contact me through email and I aim to

Policy respond within 24 hours.

Syllabus Content

- [Course Overview](#)
- [Learning Objectives](#)
- [Readings](#)
- [Assignments and Assessments](#)
- [Grading](#)
- [Course Schedule/Course Calendar](#)
- [Course Policies](#)
- [School and University Policies and Resources](#)

Course Overview

New York City has positioned itself as a global leader in the fight against climate change, often serving as a model for other jurisdictions to follow. This course explores the development and implementation of environmental legislation and policy in New York City during the past two decades. It includes discussions about historical context, environmental policymaking considerations, political processes, outcomes, and the role of stakeholders such as advocates, business, industry, labor, government actors, and community. Students will gain broad knowledge of key legislation and policies related to sustainability, resiliency, energy, emissions, waste and the circular economy, transportation, water and air quality, and green space. Furthermore, students will consider how environmental justice and equity play a role in the development of legislation and policy, and assess best practices for providing equitable treatment and engaging all communities. While the focus of the class will be on New York City, students will also learn about environmental policies implemented in other jurisdictions.

Introduction to Environmental Law and Policy in New York City is available to students in the Graduate Program for Sustainability Management. It is designed to provide future sustainability practitioners and others with a fundamental understanding of how legislation and policy is made, what influences this development, and how legislation and policy seek to address climate change in urban environments like New York City. Students will be able to use this knowledge to help government and public and private organizations achieve more sustainable solutions.

This is a semester-long elective class that will be taught on campus. Specific competencies or prerequisites are not required. This course will be interactive and discussion-intensive, engaging students to utilize and reflect critical and analytical thinking about how environmental legislation and policy is developed and how they can create innovative environmental legislation and policy in the future. Students will participate in class discussions, think

critically about policy development and assigned readings, write a reaction essay on environmental justice and equity, and present their analysis to classroom colleagues. For the final project, students will write a research report and present their report to the class, focusing on a particular environmental policy topic, identifying areas where policymaking can be improved upon and/or expanded, and developing their own recommendations for New York City to address climate change. In addition to substantive policy initiatives, the research report and presentation will include strategies for engaging stakeholders, addressing environmental justice and equity considerations, identifying challenges, navigating political processes, and achieving implementation.

[Back to top](#)

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course students should be able to:

- L1 Identify and describe key environmental legislation and policy implemented in New York City during the past two decades.
- L2 Explain the foundational concepts of environmental law and policy in New York City and how those concepts are related to government structure and processes.
- L3 Analyze how environmental law and policy is developed and implemented in New York City, including identifying the impetus for action, political processes, stakeholder input, and negotiated outcomes.
- L4 Describe and assess the role that stakeholders play in the development and implementation of environmental law and policy in New York City, including various levels of government, community, business, industry, labor, and advocates.
- L5 Examine the role that equity considerations play in the development and implementation of environmental legislation and policy, and assess best practices for providing equitable treatment and engaging all communities.
- L6 Apply knowledge gained during the course to develop policy recommendations for New York City that address climate change, including strategies for engaging stakeholders, addressing environmental justice and equity considerations, identifying challenges, and achieving implementation.

Readings by Week

Week 1 – Review course approach; intro to law and policy-making; understanding NYC government structure, and processes; considerations for developing environmental policy

- Fine and Caras, “Twenty-Five Years of Council-Mayor Governance,” 121-126, 6 pp.
- Livermore, “Threats To The Role Of Economics In Environmental Policymaking,” 49-59 11 pp.
- NYC Council, *Bill Drafting Manual*, 1-2, 2 pp.
- New York City Independent Budget Office, *Understanding NYC’s Budget*, 5-15, 11 pp.
- Nylén, “Projectified governance and sustainability transitions,” 605-614, 10 pp.
- Silvi and Padilla, “Pro-environmental behavior,” 619-624, 628-631, 10 pp.

Week 2 – Discussion of the role of city/local governments in addressing climate change, including political context and the interplay with other levels of government; role of stakeholders in environmental policymaking, including community, advocates, EJ groups, business, industry, and labor

- Baptista et al., “Landscape Assessment of the U.S. Environmental Justice Movement,” 1-7, 7 pp.

- Farber, *State Government Leadership in Climate Policy*.
- Kelly et al., *A Framework for Local Action on Climate Change*, 1-44, 44 pp.

Week 3 – Environmental justice and equity considerations in environmental policymaking; case studies in NYC; best practices for engaging communities and centering equity

- Eisenhower et al., “New Directions in Environmental Justice Research,” 322-331, 10 pp.
- Foster et al., *NYC Panel on Climate Change 2019 Report (Links to an external site.)*, Chapter 6, **126-131** (up to sec 6.3.1.1); **141-146** (up to sec 6.4.2); **153-154** (sec 6.5-sec 6.5.1.2); **157-165** (sec 6.5.2-recommendations for research), 23 pp.
- Iachan and Mulgaonkar, “Trash Tales,” 1–8, 8 pp.
- Reckien et al., *Equity, Environmental Justice, and Urban Climate Change*, 174-177, 4 pp.

Week 4 – Institutionalizing climate work in NYC: establishing the Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability, New York City Panel on Climate Change, carbon inventory, and emissions reductions; ensuring comprehensive citywide sustainability and resiliency planning, including equity considerations

- Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice. “PlaNYC: Getting Sustainability Done,” 12-25, 14 pages.
- Hess and McKane, “Making Sustainability Plans More Equitable,” 461-473, 13 pp.
- The City of New York, “Local Law 017 of 2008 [Download Local Law 017 of 2008](#),” 1-6, 6 pp.

Week 5 – Overview of energy law and policy in New York City and New York State; Issue Identification and Assessment class discussion

- NYC Environmental Justice Alliance et al., *Dirty Energy, Big Money*, 5-28, 24 pp.
- Unel, “Pursuing Rationality to Advance Energy Policy,” 17-23, 7 pp.
- Urban Green Council, “State of the NYC Grid,” 1-3, 3 pp.

Week 6 – Reducing building emissions and achieving energy efficient buildings; case studies in New York City

- Urban Green Council, “NYC’s Energy and Water Use Report,” 4-27, 24 pp.
- Urban Green Council. “NYC All-Electric New Buildings Law: Local Law 154.” 1-2, 2 pp.
- Urban Green Council, “NYC Building Emissions Law Summary, Local Law 97,” 1-2, 2 pp.

Week 7 – Overview of waste management in New York City, including environmental justice and equity considerations; recycling efforts; achieving a circular economy and reducing waste

- Bradley et al., “Community repair in the circular economy,” 1-14, 14 pp.
- Business Insider, “What Happens To NYC’s 3.2 Million Tons Of Trash,” viewing time 9 min.

- Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice. "PlaNYC: Getting Sustainability Done," 128-137, 10 pages.
- Rask, "An intersectional reading of circular economy policies," 1-13, 13 pp.
- World Economic Forum, *Towards the Circular Economy*, 10-27, 18 pp.

Week 8 – Review of different types of policy outcomes; discussion on Recommendation Identification and Assessment to address environmental issue of choice

Week 9 – Discussion of clean water in New York State and New York City; storm water infrastructure and combined sewer overflows; green and gray infrastructure

- NYC DEP, *NYC Green Infrastructure* [Links to an external site.](#), NYC Water [Links to an external site.](#), viewing time 9 min.
- Kensinger, "NYC has a plan to clean its sewage-filled waterways. [Links to an external site.](#)"
- Feldman, "These are the climate resiliency projects to watch in NYC. [Links to an external site.](#)"
- MOCEJ, "PlaNYC: Getting Sustainability Done," 38-51 (flooding), 86-93 (waterways), 22pp.
- NYC DEP. *Green Infrastructure Annual Report 2022*, 1-13, 13 pages. 2022.

Week 10 – Increasing access to green spaces and improving air quality; extreme heat; environmental justice and equity considerations and case studies in New York City

- Center for Climate and Energy Solutions. "Resilience Strategies for Extreme Heat." 1-7, 7 pp.
- *Gøtzsche et al.*, "Urban Green Spaces: Combining Goals for Sustainability and Placemaking."
- Johnson et al., "Assessing Air Quality and Public Health Benefits of NYC's Climate Action Plans," 9804-9811, 8 pp.
- Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice. "PlaNYC: Getting Sustainability Done," 28-37 and 76-85, 20pp.
- Trust for Public Land, "The Economic Benefit of Parks in New York City," 14-29, 16 pp.

Week 11 – Reducing transportation emissions and supporting alternative modes of transportation; electric vehicles and charging; reimagining the urban streetscape

- Klock-McCook et al., "EV Charging For All, How Electrifying Ridehailing Can Spur Investment in a More Equitable EV Charging Network," 6-15, 10 pp.
- Transportation Alternatives, *nyc 25x25*, 1-35, 35 pp.
- MOCEJ, "PlaNYC: Getting Sustainability Done," 94-105 12pp.

Week 12 – Class Presentations

Week 13 – Class Presentations

[Back to top](#)

Assignments and Assessments

1. Participation, Reading Assignments, and Attendance. Class participation is an important part of a student's success in this course and will enable the class to collectively advance all of the learning objectives. The reading assignments are chosen to provide students with a broad overview of the topic chosen for each class discussion, as well as information about specific legislation and policies enacted or implemented in New York City and other jurisdictions. Students will be assessed based on their level of participation, which includes attending all classes, reading all assignments in advance and preparing to discuss the material, and actively listening and contributing to class discussions. (L1, L2, L3, L4, L5, L6)

2. Reaction Essay. Environmental justice and equity are key principles that must be addressed when developing and implementing legislation and policy. However, there has been significant criticism about environmental policies that have failed to provide for underserved communities. How can government best work with environmental justice stakeholders to ensure equitable policymaking? Students will analyze and reflect on assigned readings and any lived experience, and write a two-page reaction essay based on this analysis and reflection. Students will present their essays and we will discuss concepts related to environmental justice and equity in class. The goal of the reaction essay is to examine the role that environmental justice, equity, affected communities, and advocates play in developing and implementing policies that achieve climate goals. Students will be assessed based on their reflection and analysis, written essay, essay presentation, and contributions to class discussions around environmental justice and equity. (L4, L5)

3. Research Project. The goal of the research project is to conduct an in-depth assessment of an environmental issue and develop policy recommendations that advance a more sustainable and resilient New York City. Students will choose an environmental issue as the focus of their project, conduct an in-depth analysis of current policy based on a mix of resource materials provided by the instructor and that are student-identified, and develop policy recommendations addressing their environmental issue that will help the city adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. The research project will consist of several graded assignments (four) over the course of the semester, noted below. A more detailed description of the research project and the expectations for the class discussions, research paper, and class presentation is available on Canvas. (L1, L2, L3, L4, L5, L6)

1.
 1. Environmental issue identification and assessment. Students will identify a broad topic (e.g., transportation, renewable energy, circular economy, etc.) and assess potential environmental issues related to that topic for their research project. Students will analyze relevant policies in New York City and identify key problem areas where policymaking can be improved and/or expanded upon. Students will discuss their issues and analysis in class.
 2. Recommendation identification and assessment to address environmental issue. Building off of the class discussions and their own research, students will identify and assess potential legislative and/or policy recommendations to address environmental issues related to their chosen topic. Students will provide support for their choices, explain how their recommendations solve identified problems and help New York City adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change, and discuss their recommendations in class.
 3. Research paper. Students will write a research paper on their chosen environmental issue area and policy recommendations. The research paper will identify and assess environmental issues related to their chosen topic, analyze relevant policies in New York City, identify recommendations to improve and/or expand policymaking, and analyze how their recommendations will help New York City adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. The research paper will also include strategies for engaging

stakeholders, addressing environmental justice and equity considerations, identifying challenges, navigating political processes, and achieving implementation.

4. Class presentation. Students will make a formal powerpoint presentation on their research papers to the class.

For the overall research project, students must meet the assignment criteria noted above and will be assessed based on their critical and analytical thinking, thorough research of their chosen topic, class presentations and discussions, research paper quality, and understanding of how environmental law and policy is developed and implemented in New York City.