

UEP 300 Environmental Law and Policy
Occidental College, Spring 2026
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30 p.m.-2:55 p.m.
Fowler Hall Room 111

Professor

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Email: penak@oxy.edu

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 10:30 a.m. -1:30 p.m. in UEP Suite 205 by appointment only:

<https://calendar.app.google/bWvhXrWCJLmUNOBHA>

Course Overview

UEP 300 Environmental Law and Policy is designed to prepare students in the fields of environmental policy and law, urban planning, environmental justice and advocacy, and international relations and diplomacy. Broadly, the course encourages students to develop a critical and multi-sited understanding of contemporary environmental and climate challenges, such as, the contestation over natural resources and decarbonization and the impact on Indigenous sovereignty and nature's legal rights, and ongoing conflicts related to climate migration and displacement in the U.S. and the Global South. Students will learn about the environmental justice origins of U.S. environmental policy and law and will analyze the challenges and opportunities in global environmental governance with discussion and debates on the movement of plastics and e-waste, the High Seas Treaty, and the UN Climate Summit. The course will also introduce students to climate policy and advocacy in California and local-level environmental planning and sustainability efforts in Los Angeles.

Course Learning Outcomes

- Engage with critical environmental justice and other frameworks to further develop an intersectional understanding of contemporary environmental and climate challenges.
- Analyze historical and contemporary legislation and international agreements to develop a robust foundation of U.S. and global environmental policy and law.
- Learn and apply conceptual, analytical, and theoretical frameworks in the analysis of climate politics and policy.
- Utilize case studies and engage in local and regional field trips with grassroots organizations to evaluate local and state-level environmental policy and law.
- Enhance analytical writing and communication skills through individual and group written assignments and in-class activities.

Required Text

Mendez, Michael. (2020). *Climate change from the streets: How conflict and collaboration strengthen the environmental justice movement*. Yale University Press.

<https://www-jstor-org.oxy.idm.oclc.org/stable/j.ctvt1sgmc>

The book *Environmental Law and Policy*, 6th edition (2024) by James Salzman and Barton Thompson is a key text we will use in the course to provide an overview of U.S. environmental policy. An electronic version is available for reference at the [library](#).

Credit Hour Policy

UEP 300 is a 4-unit course. On average, you should expect to spend at least twelve (12) hours a week (including in-class time) on this course. This course meets the requirements for the UEP major and minor.

Summary of Course Assignments and Assessments	Grade %
Attendance and Class Participation: Attendance is mandatory; students will have two to three absences before attendance affects their grades. In-class participation refers to your engagement with the course material in small and large group class activities.	10%
Daily News Article Each student is required to discuss a relevant news article at the beginning of class. Please post the link by 5 p.m. the day before class. Link available on Canvas	5%
Class Activities: - Legislative Research - Discussion Questions for the book, <i>Climate Change from the Streets</i> - Data Mining for Justice - Discourse Analysis	10%
Assignments: There are four written assignments ranging from 1,500 to 2,500 words each. Details and rubrics for written assignments will be available on Canvas. Assignment # 1 Policy Memo: Connecting U.S. Environmental Policy to Climate Change Due: Friday, February 20, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. Assignment #2 Policy Brief: Just Transitions in California Due: Monday, March 23, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. Assignment #3 Policy Memo: UN COP 31 Due: Monday, April 6, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.	30%
UN Climate Summit Simulation	10%
Environmental Sustainability in Los Angeles	15%
Final Portfolio Due: Friday, May 8, 2026	20%
Total:	100%

Late Assignments

You have a 48-hour grace period for turning in one of the three written assignments. The late penalty for assignments is as follows: 10% off for each day the assignments are late.

Grading Scale

A: 93-100; A-: 90-93; B+: 87-90; B: 83-87; B-: 80-83; C+: 77-80; C: 73-77; C-: 70-73; D+: 67-70; D: 63-67; F: 0-63.

Course Design

Class meetings will be on Tuesdays and Thursdays, in person with no remote access available.

Inclusive Classroom

We are fully committed to developing an inclusive classroom that supports diversity of thought, identities, backgrounds, experiences, and learning preferences. The course will benefit from each of your unique perspectives on course questions and materials, and I encourage you to contribute to a healthy class discussion throughout this course. Please be respectful of other people's views, opinions, and ideas, and help us to create an effective and inclusive learning environment for everyone.

Additionally, part of equity and justice work is to dismantle barriers to success for all people. If there are aspects of the design, instruction, and/or experiences within this course that result in barriers to your success or accurate assessment of achievement, or if there are ways we can improve the effectiveness of this course for you personally or for other students or student groups, please let us know.

Generative AI

The use of generative AI technologies to assist with your assignments, such as ChatGPT or Elicit, is prohibited in this class. Instances of generative AI use will be treated as potential plagiarism and referred as such.

Mid-Semester Progress Reports

I will provide a mid-semester progress report for each student. Mid-semester progress reports are not intended to be used as determinative or predictive of the final grade in a course, but to provide an opportunity to communicate an approximate estimation of progress by the students in the course by the midpoint of the current semester.

Spring 2026 Course Schedule

All readings and details for assignments and class activities are on Canvas. Students are required to read the material before attending class and prepare to engage in discussion. Class lectures will be posted after the class to Canvas.

Introduction to Environmental Law and Policy**Tuesday, January 20, 2026 - Introduction/Overview of Course**

Review the syllabus in class and discuss key environmental and climate challenges of our times.

Thursday, January 22, 2026 - Environmental and Climate Challenges

Robinson, M., and Shine, T.(2018). Achieving a climate justice pathway to 1.5 °C. *Nature Climate Change*, 8(7), 564–569. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0189-7>

Victor, D., Lumkowsky, M., Dannenberg, A., and Carlton, E. (2022). “Success of the Paris Agreement hinges on the credibility of national climate goals.” *Brookings Institution*. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/success-of-the-paris-agreement-hinges-on-the-credibility-of-national-climate-goals/>

Natural Resources Defense Council. (2021, February 19). Paris Climate Agreement: Everything You Need to Know. <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/paris-climate-agreement-everything-you-need-know>

Tuesday, January 27, 2026 - Critical Environmental Justice

Kojola, E., & Pellow, D. N. (2021). New directions in environmental justice studies: Examining the state and violence. *Environmental Politics*, 30(1–2), 100–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2020.1836898>

Alvarez, C. H., Theis, N. G., & Shtob, D. A. (2021). Military as an Institution and Militarization as a Process: Theorizing the U.S. Military and Environmental Justice. *Environmental Justice*, 14(6), 426–434. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3q27x5bn>

Thursday, January 29, 2026 - Indigenous Sovereignty and Nature’s Legal Rights

Tsosie, R. (2013). Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples: Comparative Models of Sovereignty. *Tulane Environmental Law Journal*, 26(2), Article 2. <https://journals.tulane.edu/elj/article/view/2314>

Boyd, D. R. (2018). Recognizing the Rights of Nature: Lofty Rhetoric or Legal Revolution? *Natural Resources & Environment*, 32(4), 13–17.

Origins of U.S. Environmental Policy

Tuesday, February 3, 2026 - Environmental Policy, Theory, and Practice

Read “Chapter 2 Perspectives on Environmental Law and Policy” from Environmental Law and Policy (6th Edition)

Read “Chapter 3 Making Environmental Policy” from Kraft, M. (2022) *Environmental Policy and Politics*. Routledge.

Thursday, February 5, 2026 - Clean Air (1963) and Clean Water Act (1948/1972)

Read “Chapter 5 Clean Air Act” and “Chapter 7 Water Pollution” from Environmental Law and Policy (6th Edition).

Tomassoni, B. T. (2026, January 14). New EPA Proposal Would Strip States’ and Tribes’ Authority to Block Oil and Gas Pipelines, Other Infrastructure Projects. *Inside Climate News*.

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/14012026/epa-proposal-streamlines-oil-gas-infrastructure-approval/>

Tuesday, February 10, 2026 - Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (1976)

U.S. EPA. (2023). *Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) Overview*. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

<https://www.epa.gov/rcra/resource-conservation-and-recovery-act-rcra-overview>

McCalib, R. (2017). Opening the Gates of Cow Palace: Regulating Runoff Manure as a Hazardous Waste Under RCRA. *Michigan Law Review*, 116.3, 501-.

<https://doi.org/10.36644/mlr.116.3.opening>

Class Activity: Legislative Research

Thursday, February 12, 2026 – Biodiversity, Wildlife, and Conservation

Graddy-Lovelace, G., Diamond, A., & Ichikawa, N. F. (2020). Contextualizing the Farm Bill: Questions of food, land and agricultural governance. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, 35(4), 352–357. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742170520000125>

Farm Bill Primer: Conservation Title. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF12024>

Price, B. K. (2025, December 20). How Proposed Changes to the Endangered Species Act Could Further Threaten the Country's Imperiled Species. *Inside Climate News*.

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/20122025/how-proposed-changes-to-the-endangered-species-act-could-further-threaten-the-countrys-imperiled-species/>

Assignment # 1 Policy Memo: Connecting U.S. Environmental Policy to Climate Change
Due: Friday, February 20, 2026, 5:00 p.m.

Climate Politics and Policy

Tuesday, February 17, 2026 - Environmental Migration and Displacement

Collins, L. (2015). Chapter 12: The United Nations, human rights and the environment. In A. Gear & Louis J. Kotzé (Eds.), *Research Handbook on Human Rights and the Environment*.

<https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap/edcoll/9781782544425/9781782544425.00019.xml>

Saad, A. (2017). Toward a Justice Framework for Understanding and Responding to Climate Migration and Displacement. *Environmental Justice*, 10(4), 98–101.

<https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2016.0033>

Ybarra, M. (2021). Site Fight! Toward the Abolition of Immigrant Detention on Tacoma's Tar Pits (and Everywhere Else). *Antipode*, 53(1), 36–55. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12610>

Thursday, February 19, 2026 - Carbon Markets

Blanton, A., Mohan, M., Galgamuwa, G. A. P., Watt, M. S., Montenegro, J. F., Mills, F., Carlsen, S. C. H., Velasquez-Camacho, L., Bomfim, B., Pons, J., Broadbent, E. N., Kaur, A., Direk, S.,

de-Miguel, S., Ortega, M., Abdullah, M., Rondon, M., Wan Mohd Jaafar, W. S., Silva, C. A., ... Ewane, E. B. (2024). The status of forest carbon markets in Latin America. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 352, 119921. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2023.119921>

General information on carbon taxes: <https://www.c2es.org/content/carbon-tax-basics/>

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 - Climate Politics in California Part I

Read Chapters 1-2 from Michael Mendez (2020). *Climate change from the streets: How conflict and collaboration strengthen the environmental justice movement*. Yale University Press.

Plumer, B. (2022). California Approves a Wave of Aggressive New Climate Measures. *NYTimes*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/01/climate/california-lawmakers-climate-legislation.html>

Thursday, February 26, 2026 - Climate Politics in California Part II

Read Chapters 3-5 from Michael Mendez (2020). *Climate change from the streets: How conflict and collaboration strengthen the environmental justice movement*. Yale University Press.

Discussion Questions for the book *Climate Change from the Streets*

Tuesday, March 4, 2026 - Just Transitions and Decarbonization

J. Mijin Cha, Madeline Wander, & Manuel Pastor. (2020). Environmental Justice, Just Transition, and a Low-Carbon Future for California. *Environmental Law Reporter*, 50. <https://www.elr.info/sites/default/files/article/2020/02/50.10216.pdf>

Blair, J. J. A., Balcázar, R. M., Barandiarán, J., & Maxwell, A. (2023). The ‘Alterlives’ of Green Extractivism: Lithium Mining and Exhausted Ecologies in the Atacama Desert. *International Development Policy Revue Internationale de Politique de Développement*, 16, Article 16. <https://doi.org/10.4000/poldev.5284>

Class Activity: Mining for Data Justice

Additional Sources:

Larsen, J., King, B., Kolus, H., Dasari, Naveen., Bower, G., and Jones, W. (2022). “A Turning Point for US Climate Progress: Assessing the Climate and Clean Energy Provisions in the Inflation Reduction Act.” *Rhodium Group*. <https://rhg.com/research/climate-clean-energy-inflation-reduction-act/>

Leber R. (2022). “The US finally has a law to tackle climate change.” *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2022/7/28/23281757/whats-in-climate-bill-inflation-reduction-act>.

Thursday, March 5, 2025 – No Readings! Professor Madeline Wander Guest Speaker for class and preparation for Assignment #2

Assignment #2 Policy Brief: Just Transitions in California
Due: Friday, March 23, 2026, 5:00 p.m.

Spring Break Monday, March 9 - Friday, March 13, 2026

Global Environmental Governance

Tuesday, March 17, 2026 - Governing Transboundary Hazardous Waste

United Nations Environment Programme (2025) Information Note: Free trade zones, trans-shipment and multilateral environmental agreements:

<https://www.basel.int/Portals/4/download.aspx?d=UNEP-FAO-CHW-RC-POPS-PUB-IllegalTradeTraffic-GreenCustoms-2025.English.pdf>

Basel Convention (2022) Fact Sheet #3 Control of Transboundary Movements of Plastic Waste.

<https://www.basel.int/Portals/4/download.aspx?d=UNEP-CHW-PUB-Factsheets-PlasticWaste-TBM-3-2022.English.pdf>

Lebbie, T. S., Moyebi, O. D., Asante, K. A., Fobil, J., Brune-Drisse, M. N., Suk, W. A., Sly, P. D., Gorman, J., & Carpenter, D. O. (2021). E-Waste in Africa: A Serious Threat to the Health of Children. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(16), 8488-.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18168488>

Ralston, R., & Taggart, J. (2025). Plastic Partnerships: How Corporations Are Hedging Against the UN Global Plastics Treaty. *Global Environmental Politics*, 25(1), 77–88.

Additional Sources:

Basel Convention (2022) Fact Sheet #1 An Introduction to the Global Plastic Waste Crisis

<https://www.basel.int/Portals/4/download.aspx?d=UNEP-CHW-PUB-Factsheets-PlasticWaste-Introduction-1-2022.English.pdf>

Basel Convention: [Guidance materials relevant for the environmentally sound management of plastic waste](#)

The U.S. EPA New International Requirements for the Export and Import of Plastic Recyclables and

Waste: <https://www.epa.gov/hwgenerators/new-international-requirements-export-and-import-plastic-recyclables-and-waste>

Thursday, March 19, 2026 - Law of the Sea (1982) and the High Seas Treaty (2026)

Armstrong, C. (2024). The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, global justice and the environment. *Global Constitutionalism: Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law*, 13(1), 16–20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045381723000151>

Swift, A., & Pickerell, T. (2026). *After 20 Years, an Agreement to Safeguard the “High Seas” Takes Force*. World Resources Institute. <https://www.wri.org/insights/high-seas-treaty-explainer>

Additional Sources:

Caitlin Keating-Bitonti. (2023). *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS): Living Resources Provisions*. U.S. Congressional Research Service.

<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47744>

UN Press. (2023). [Demonstrating ‘the Power of Multilateralism’. Intergovernmental Conference Adopts Historic New Maritime Biodiversity Treaty. United Nations.](#)

[Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction](#)

Tuesday, March 24, 2026 - UN Climate Summit Preparation

Thursday, March 26, 2026 - UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 30)

From Advocacy to Policy Implementation

Tuesday, March 31, 2026 - Stakeholder Insights

Thursday, April 2, 2026 - E-waste Project Introduction

Assignment #3 Policy Memo: UN COP 31

Due: Monday, April 6, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.

The Urban Environment of Los Angeles

Tuesday, April 7, 2026 - In class research

Thursday, April 9, 2026 - In class research

Monday, April 13, 2026 - E-waste Collection

Tuesday, April 14, 2026 - Site Visit

Thursday, April 17, 2026 – Site Visit

Founder's Day - No Class Tuesday, April 21, 2026

Thursday, April 23, 2026 – Bring all the research together.

**Tuesday, April 28, 2026 - Guest Speaker during class time,
Professor James Blair, from Cal Poly Pomona**

Final Portfolio due during Final Exam Week between May 4 – 8.

Class Details and Expectations

Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity is a shared community value. It is built around trust and respect between members of the Occidental Community, and embodies a commitment to honesty and integrity in every aspect of one's academic life.

All members of the Occidental community are committed to uphold the highest degree of academic integrity. Unless stipulated otherwise, the academic work done for all assignments is expected to be the student's own; students are expected to give proper credit to the ideas and work of others.

Signing the Academic Integrity Commitment at the beginning of every semester represents a student's affirmation to uphold the shared values of honesty and integrity. When signing the Integrity Commitment associated with work in a course, students are affirming that they have not cheated, plagiarized, fabricated, or falsified information; nor assisted others in these actions.

Refer to [Student Handbook](#) for the framing of the commitment, definitions of Academic Ethics, and Process for alleged violations of the commitment.

Civil Rights & Title IX statement, and statement of role of faculty member as a responsible employee

In the event that you write or speak about having experienced discrimination or harassment on the basis of a protected characteristic or sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, stalking, sexual exploitation or any other form of sexual and/or gender-based harassment), as a designated Responsible Employee, I must inform the [Civil Rights & Title IX Office](#). They will contact you to let you know about resources and support services at Oxy, as well as reporting options both on and off-campus. You have no obligation to respond to the Civil Rights & Title IX Office or to meet with them to discuss support services and reporting options.

If you do not want the Civil Rights & Title IX Office contacted, instead of disclosing this information to your instructor, either through conversation or a class assignment, you can speak confidentially with:

- Oxy's Survivor Advocate, Project SAFE (survivoradvocate@oxy.edu)
- Emmons Counseling (For appointments, call: 323-259-2657)
- Rev. Dr. Susan Young, Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (young@oxy.edu)
- Oxy 24/7 Confidential Hotline (323-341-4141)

The College's civil rights policies, along with additional resources, can be found at: <https://www.oxy.edu/civil-rights-title-ix>. If you would like to contact the Civil Rights & Title IX Office directly, you may email Civil Rights & Title IX Coordinator Alexandra Fulcher at afulcher@oxy.edu or call 323-259-1338.

Support Services and Additional Information

Special Accommodations/Learning Differences

- Occidental College (Oxy) complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, and other applicable state and federal law prohibiting discrimination against individuals with disabilities.
- All accommodation requests including academic, housing (ESA & Services Animal) and temporary accommodations are managed by the Disability Services Office. It is a student's responsibility to request accommodations via the [Disability Services](#) website. For information about additional accommodations and support services, students can email accessibility@oxy.edu.
- Oxy's Psychological Testing Program: We offer low cost psychological testing for students who qualify. Any student who thinks they may have a learning, or psychological disability may complete [Oxy's Psych Testing Application](#) to be added to the waitlist.
- Academic Success Coaching: Our Academic Success Coach assists students in developing skills and strategies to enhance their academic performance. They provide personalized guidance on time management, organization, study techniques, goal setting, and self-regulation. By collaborating with students, our coach helps identify and overcome obstacles to academic success, fostering a supportive environment that promotes personal and educational growth. Contact: academiccoaching@oxy.edu
- Learning Disability Specialist: Our Learning Disability Specialist evaluates and supports students with (diagnosed or suspected) learning disabilities. They also provide counseling and resources to help students develop effective learning strategies. By collaborating with students, our Learning Disability Specialist helps identify and overcome obstacles to academic success, fostering a supportive environment that promotes personal and educational growth. Please contact: accessibility@oxy.edu.

Accommodations for Reasons of Faith and Conscience

Consistent with Occidental College's commitment to creating an academic community that is respectful of and welcoming to persons of differing backgrounds, we believe that students should be excused from class for reasons of faith and conscience without academic consequence. While it is not feasible to schedule coursework around all days of conviction for a class as a whole, faculty will honor requests from individual students to reschedule coursework, to be absent from classes that conflict with the identified days. Information about [this policy](#) is available on the [ORSL website](#).

Support Services

A number of services are available here at Occidental College to make sure that you excel academically and socially. There are a number of opportunities for academic support. Please visit the following website at <https://www.oxy.edu/academics/student-success> to see the variety of services offered, including writing support, tutoring, research assistance, language tutoring, and academic coaching. The Emmons Wellness Center provides medical services and counseling. Visit their website for information on specific services provided: <https://www.oxy.edu/student-life/resources-support/emmons-wellness-center>

Laptop Lending Program

Occasionally students may need a short-term or semester-long loan of a laptop to complete their coursework. Students may request a loaner laptop from the Library Information Desk at the Academic Commons. Students will have rights to load any needed software onto the loaner computers (e.g., SPSS, Matlab, ArcGIS Pro, etc.).