Overview
The world’s water resources are widely considered to be in crisis – from prolonged drought and climate change, urbanization and increasing demand, and institutional breakdown. What are the drivers of crisis and governance failure? How should we respond? This course examines major issues in international water policy, including: the role of water markets and privatization; the return of large dams; how environmental needs and in-stream flows are treated in policy; cities and social equity in water provision; transboundary conflicts and mediating institutions; climate change impacts and adaptation; and the promise and perils of water supply alternatives. We will analyze recent debates about water law and policy reforms in both national and international arenas, with special attention to how institutions in Oregon and California are responding to the recent mega-drought. The course combines analysis of key international organization (e.g., The World Bank, Global Water Partnership, World Water Council) with case studies of several countries whose experiments in water policy hold broader international significance – such as Chile, Spain, Mexico, South Africa, Australia, the United States, and the European Union. Overall, the objective of the course is to equip students with an interdisciplinary understanding of contemporary water problems, policies, and institutions, from the different analytical perspectives of law, geography, political economy, development studies, and institutional economics. Welcome!
Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

• Define and contextualize key terms in global water policy.
• Characterize and critically assess claims, reforms, institutions, and case studies in water governance, drawing on different perspectives and disciplinary approaches.
• Critical analyze a key problem in water governance, through the production of an original text (either a policy brief or research paper) that draws on original research and applies the theoretical vocabulary and concepts learned in the course.

Topics

• Trends in ‘proper’ water management, from IWRM to watersheds to water security frameworks
• Historical evolution of water rights, property regimes, diverse legal traditions and norms, and legal pluralism
• Water markets, privatization, economic reform, and marketization trends in global governance
• Big dam development and small dam removal
• River restoration science and policy at the international level
• Global water organizations and expert networks
• Transboundary water conflicts and institutions (e.g. the Columbia River Treaty)
• The politics of water supply alternatives (e.g. desalination, recycled effluent, urban rainwater harvesting)
• Urban water provision, uneven development, and the future of networked infrastructure
• The right to water

Highlights

• Class sessions combine mini-lectures, original research activities, knowledgeable guests, and student-led discussions to foster an active and engaged model of learning.
• Field trip to visit operations center of Willamette River dams (date and details to be announced) and discuss challenges in dam/ecosystem management with the Army Corps of Engineers.
• Student learning culminates in an original research product on a critical issue in water policy, in the form of a policy brief or individual/group research paper intended for peer-review publication or a thesis prospectus.
• A truly interdisciplinary and global approach to water, grounded in the social and policy sciences. Undergraduates, graduate, and professional students from all departments and programs are welcome, though in experience in (or at least a healthy appetite for!) water issues will help you succeed in this course. Current or future law students are especially welcome!
• Fulfills upper-division policy course requirement for the Environmental Studies major; the Geography major (for the Environment track and the new Water Science & Society specialization); and may meet requirements for the International Studies major.