The fields of energy and environmental law are converging, and Vanderbilt’s Energy, Environment and Land Use Program offers a broad array of upper-level courses, research opportunities and extracurricular activities to students interested in focusing on these important areas. The program also sponsors externships and fosters research opportunities through the Vanderbilt Institute for Energy and Environment and the Climate Change Research Network, an interdisciplinary team of faculty, graduate and professional students representing several Vanderbilt schools and academic departments.

An Extensive Curriculum

In addition to Property Law and Torts, all first-year students take Regulatory State, a course that introduces statutes and agency decisions and the central role they play in the modern legal system. These required courses lay the groundwork for an array of elective courses and seminars addressing topics in energy, environmental and land use law, including:

- Climate Change Justice
- Ecosystem Management
- Endangered Species Seminar
- Energy Law
- Environmental Law
- Environmental Law & Policy Annual Review
- International Environmental Law
- Land Use Regulation
- Law & Business of Climate Change
- Oil & Gas Law
- Renewable Energy Seminar
- Sustainable Cities Seminar

Vanderbilt also offers many other courses that inform the study and practice of energy, environmental and land use law, including Administrative Law, Federal Courts, Local Government Law, Conflict of Laws, Constitutional Protection of Property Rights, Ethics and Public Policy and International Trade Law, among others.

Interdisciplinary Research Network

Climate change is one of the most difficult problems facing modern society, and Vanderbilt University is a leader in offering interdisciplinary approaches aimed at developing effective legal, economic and social responses to climate change. The Vanderbilt Climate Change Research Network (CCRN) forms and supports cross-disciplinary teams of faculty, graduate and professional students who conduct theoretical and applied research on the energy use and carbon emissions arising from household and corporate behavior. Through CCRN, Vanderbilt students may participate in research initiatives that explore the role of the legal system in preparing for and adapting to climate change.

Research Assistantships and Independent Study

Opportunities to serve as research assistants or conduct independent research for course credit are available each semester. Research assistants have worked on projects exploring the role of law and social norms in shaping consumer behavior, the effects of legal sanctions on corporate environmental compliance, the evolution of ecosystem management law, and the intersection of wind energy development and endangered species protection.

Summer and Semester Externships

Students interested in working in environmental organizations and government agencies may pursue summer and semester externships. Vanderbilt Law students have participated in summer externships with the federal Environmental Protection Agency and state agencies such as the California State Water Resources Control Board and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation as well as many non-profit organizations, including Hudson Riverkeeper, the Southern Environmental Law Center, Wildearth Guardians, the Land Trust for Tennessee and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. Summer stipends may be available.

Learn more about Vanderbilt Law School’s Energy, Environment and Land Use Program at: www.law.vanderbilt.edu/environment
Join the Environmental Law Society

Students in the Environmental Law Society organize service projects and sponsor speakers and symposia on topics of importance to leaders in law, government and business.

Career Opportunities

Vanderbilt Law graduates serve in a wide range of energy, environmental and land use law and policy positions in private law firms, corporations, government agencies, public interest groups and other organizations. The Career Services office provides special assistance to students interested in government and other public interest careers in environmental and energy law in addition to coordinating on-campus interviews with hundreds of private employers.

The Environmental Law and Policy Annual Review

Vanderbilt Law students work with Environmental Law Institute staff to edit and publish the Environmental Law and Policy Annual Review (ELPAR), an annual compendium of scholarly articles presenting the best legal and policy solutions to pressing environmental problems, along with commentaries from leading experts from the academy, law firms, business, government and non-governmental organizations. ELPAR affords students the opportunity to identify the year’s best articles, publish a one-issue student-edited volume each year, and participate in an annual environmental law symposium focusing on policy recommendations held in Washington, D.C.

Vanderbilt’s Energy, Environment and Land Use Faculty

Michael P. Vandenbergh is a leading scholar in environmental and energy law whose research explores the relationship between formal legal regulation and informal social regulation of individual and corporate behavior. His corporate work also explores the ways in which private contracting can enhance or undermine public governance. A former chief of staff of the Environmental Protection Agency, Vandenbergh co-founded and directs the Vanderbilt Climate Change Research Network, an interdisciplinary initiative that involves faculty and graduate students representing several Vanderbilt schools, departments and research centers.

J. B. Ruhl is an expert in environmental law, land use, and property law. He joined Vanderbilt’s law faculty as the David Daniels Allen Distinguished Chair in Law in 2011. His influential scholarly articles address environmental law relating to climate change, the Endangered Species Act, ecosystems, federal public lands, and other land use and environmental issues. His works have been selected among the best law review articles in the field of environmental law six times from 1989 to 2011.

Vanderbilt’s Law and Economics Program

Economic analysis is an important aspect of the Energy, Environment and Land Use Program, and Vanderbilt’s Law and Economics Program provides opportunities to interact with noted economist W. Kip Viscusi, a leading expert in risk analysis and environmental regulation.

Broad Faculty Expertise

Vanderbilt faculty whose work has addressed energy, environmental or land use law include administrative law scholars Lisa Bressman, Edward Rubin and Kevin Stack, as well as Mark Cohen of Vanderbilt’s Owen Graduate School of Management, an expert on corporate environmental compliance, and Jonathan Gilligan of Vanderbilt’s Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, whose recent work addresses science policy and carbon emissions reductions.

“The people who are in a position to make environmental policy don’t often have the time to read the work done by the most sophisticated scholars. We formed the Environmental Law Policy Annual Review to highlight three to six articles each year that offer the best policy ideas. Students work with an expert advisory board to select those articles, interact with the authors, edit the articles, identify commentators, and plan and participate in a conference with policymakers on Capitol Hill.”

Michael Vandenbergh, Director, Climate Change Research Network