

Recommendations for  
Stanford Law School Students  
Interested in Careers in Policy  
and Social Problem Solving  
(P/SPS)

2020-21



## Introduction

Stanford Law School (SLS) graduates play important roles solving many of our greatest societal problems—in areas such as education, health, energy, and domestic and global poverty—that call for action by governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and hybrid organizations. In addition to a broad range of careers in the law, our graduates pursue careers directly involved with policy and social problem solving.

- *Policy* careers include working for federal, state, and local government institutions, policy think tanks, and businesses and nonprofit organizations trying to navigate or influence public policies.
- *Social problem-solving* careers include working for governments, nonprofits, and businesses directly to solve social, environmental, and health problems at local, national, or global scales.

We will refer to these two domains collectively as “P/SPS.”

This guide is intended to help current students who are interested in such roles understand the academic and extracurricular resources available to them at SLS and put those resources to use.

## Curriculum

The courses described below are offered in the context of many standard SLS courses and public interest programs that are of value to students pursuing P/SPS careers:

- [\*Standard Courses\*](#) are both *substantive* (environment, health, education, social justice, digital governance, international human rights, etc.) and *trans-substantive* (administrative law, civil procedure, etc.). Virtually all of these courses focus on issues of policy as well as law, reflecting the fact that the law—whether established by legislatures, regulatory agencies, or courts—embodies policy decisions.
- [\*The Mills Legal Clinic\*](#) offers experiences in community law, criminal defense, criminal prosecution, environmental law, immigrants’ rights, international human rights, intellectual property and innovation, organizations and transactions, religious liberty, Supreme Court litigation, and youth and education.
- [\*Policy Labs\*](#) provide SLS students with hands-on experience influencing and advising individuals, government agencies, and non-profit organizations about cutting-edge issues in real time.
- [\*The Levin Center Externship Program\*](#) allows students to gain practical experience in public service. The externship companion seminar (Law 881) provides directed

supervision of externships, as well as participation in weekly seminars, to evaluate such questions as how to make decisions about the allocation of limited resources and how to choose between litigating on behalf of individuals or a group of clients.

In this section, we describe foundational SLS courses relevant to a wide range of P/SPS work, organized in two broad categories: basic topics that are fundamental to virtually all careers in P/SPS and advanced topics. Students will find a wide variety of P/SPS courses within the Law School, which you may complement through electives at other Schools throughout the University. (See “Selected Courses Outside the Law School” below.) Students can pursue a P/SPS program within the regular three-year JD curriculum without slighting essential law courses.

With the objective of providing students real-time advice, we only describe courses that are offered during the winter and spring quarters of 2020-21. Many other relevant courses have been offered in past years and will be offered in the future, and we will update the list for the 2021-22 academic year and beyond.

We also should note that groups of faculty are planning to develop new course offerings specifically tailored to students contemplating careers in P/SPS—in areas such as causal inference, empirical methods, inequalities of income and wealth, policy analysis, political institutions, and political economy.<sup>1</sup>

## Basic Topics

### Causal inference and other aspects of learning from evidence

The success of every P/SPS effort depends on having an accurate understanding of the causes of a problem and making sound predictions about the effects of possible solutions. Students should emerge with an understanding of how to draw (and avoid drawing) inferences about causality from social, environmental, and health phenomena, and how much confidence one can have in one’s inferences. Courses in this area cover frequentist and Bayesian statistics, confidence intervals, and the counterfactual;

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<sup>1</sup> The development of new courses and related programs is being coordinated by a small steering group appointed by Dean Jenny Martinez. As currently constituted, the group includes Paul Brest and Anne Joseph O’Connell (co-chairs), Michelle Anderson, Diane Chin, Luci Herman, and Rob MacCoun. To assist the group’s work, Paul Brest offered a Spring Quarter Policy Practicum, “[Designing a Curriculum in Social Problem Solving and Policy](#)” (Law 807M), in which Luci Herman and Seth Kolker (now a 2L) played essential roles. The policy lab endeavored to learn about the careers that graduates have had in social problem solving, policymaking, and policy advocacy; what skills their work demands; and how they acquired those skills. We examined the curricula of policy schools, law schools, and business schools to learn how they prepare students for these roles; learned what relevant courses currently exist at SLS and in other schools at Stanford; and ascertained student interest in particular courses, including what attracts or deters students from pursuing joint degrees in policy. The steering group continues to meet, and is currently working with faculty to explore the development of new foundational courses for a program in policy and social problem solving.

particular techniques including randomized controlled trials, matching, before/after comparisons, regression discontinuity design, and econometrics; and field experiments and program evaluation.

- John Donohue, [Statistical Inference in Law \(7512\)](#). Spring.

## Inequalities in society

All P/SPS takes place in societies fraught with inequalities. Understanding the roots and nature of these inequalities, and successful and unsuccessful efforts to address them, is essential to successful P/SPS. Topics in this area include qualitative and quantitative approaches to understanding how inequalities were historically produced and are manifested today; theoretical and empirical frameworks for analyzing interventions that address these inequalities; and strategies to build a diverse, equitable, and inclusive society.

- Michelle Anderson, [Local Government Law \(7051\)](#). Winter.
- Rick Banks, [Race, Disadvantage, and Elite Education: The Allocation of Opportunity \(7076\)](#). Spring.
- Rabia Belt, [Disability Law \(7018\)](#). Spring.
- Rabia Belt, [History of Civil Rights Law \(7838\)](#). Spring.
- Michele Dauber, [The White Supremacist Constitution: American Constitutional History \(7008\)](#). Winter.
- Michele Dauber, [One in Five: The Law, Politics, and Policy of Campus Sexual Assault \(7065\)](#). Spring.
- Richard Ford, [Critical Race Theory \(7016\)](#). Winter.
- Michael McConnell, [Reconstruction: Adding the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments \(7100\)](#). Winter.
- David Owens, [Race and Policing: Accountability and Civil Liability \(7103\)](#). Winter.
- Deborah Rhode, [Gender, Law, and Public Policy \(1080\)](#) Winter.
- Norman Spaulding, [Policy Practicum: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Research Clearinghouse \(807Y\)](#). Fall and Winter.

## Microeconomics

Virtually all public policy making and much social problem solving employ or correct for market mechanisms (and imperfections) to achieve their goals. Topics in this area involve the allocation of scarce resources; the market mechanisms that establish relative prices, and situations where markets fail to produce efficient results.

- A. Mitchell Polinsky, [Introduction to Law and Economics \(7503\)](#). Winter.
- A. Mitchell Polinsky, [Economic Analysis of Law \(7502\)](#). Winter.

## Policy analysis

A survey of the basic tools and concepts of policy analysis is valuable for anyone entering the policy arena. Topics in this area cover thinking like a policy analyst (as distinguished from an advocate or lawyer), scoping policy problems, policy research

skills, promoting and assessing evidence quality, and making valid (and avoiding invalid) inferences.

- Rob MacCoun (lead instructor), [Elements of Policy Analysis \(7846\)](#). Winter and Spring (including prerequisite methods bootcamp for [Policy Lab practicums](#)).

## Policy writing and communications

The Law School excels in teaching legal writing and advocacy. P/SPS demands additional communications skills—to convey policy analyses, advocate for particular solutions, and navigate modern media environments. Policy writing and communications styles are distinct from legal research, writing, and oral argument. Topics include public policy communications (policy proposals, various types of short memos, policy case studies, white papers, and scholarly reports) and advocacy communications, including op-eds. Students also have opportunities to learn effective visualization tools and graphics for presenting data and policy briefing style for clients, colleagues, and decision makers. These topics are typically offered through the [Elements of Policy Analysis \(7846\)](#), though they may also be offered at the request of an instructor for a particular policy practicum or project. [Luci Herman](#) is also available to consult individually with students on any policy writing project.

- Luciana Herman, [Policy Writing: Memos and Briefing Papers \(7846\)](#). Winter and Spring.
- Luciana Herman, Op-Ed Writing, an optional lunchtime workshop. Spring.
- Mariam Miller, Effective Presentations for Colleagues and Clients (7846). Winter and Spring (to be scheduled).
- Keniel Yao, data scientist with the Computational Policy Lab, Working with and Visualizing Data (7846). Winter and Spring (to be scheduled).

## Political institutions

An understanding of political institutions is essential to much policy analysis, policy making, and implementation. Topics in this area cover topics including choices by individuals and groups, cooperation, collective action, public goods, and externalities as applied to decisions by legislatures, administrative agencies, and even courts.

- Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar, David Engstrom, and Marietje Schaake, [Governing Artificial Intelligence: Law, Policy, and Institutions \(4052\)](#). Spring.
- John Donohue, [Optimal Size and Scope of Government \(7099\)](#). Spring.
- Daniel Ho, [Law and Politics of Bureaucracy \(7096\)](#). Spring.
- Wendy Salkin, [Representation \(5813\)](#). Winter

## Social problem solving

The keystone of most solutions to social problems is the theory of change, which describes the activities that will lead to behaviors and other intermediate outcomes on the path to a solution. The design of a theory of change must be preceded by a good understanding of the problem and its causes, the consideration of a range of approaches, and input from multiple stakeholders; implementation of a solution must

be attended by continual monitoring, feedback, and course corrections. These processes are best taught through exercises or projects that challenge students to develop solutions to real-world problems.

- Paul Brest, [Problem Solving and Decision Making for Public Policy and Social Change. 7508](#). Winter.
- Paul Brest (co-instructor), [Elements of Policy Analysis \(7846\)](#) (as part of methods bootcamp for [Policy Lab practicums](#)). Winter and Spring.

## Advanced Topics

### Accounting

Understanding basic principles of accounting is useful whether running a social enterprise or trying to understand the financial statements of a large corporation.

- Colleen Honigsberg, [Accounting \(7802\)](#). Spring.

### Global Policy

For the many SLS graduates who will be involved in the formulation and interpretation of policies promulgated in the U.S. and internationally, a sense of their landscape is essential.

- Erik Jensen and Dinsha Mistree, [Global Poverty and the Law \(5025\)](#). Winter.
- Curtis Milhaupt, [Global Business Law – Asia \(1060\)](#). Winter.
- Robert Daines / Curtis Milhaupt, [Global Business Law and Public Policy \(1063\)](#). Winter.
- Jamie O’Connell, [Business, Social Responsibility, and Human Rights \(1047\)](#). Spring.
- Beth Van Schaack, International Human Rights (5010). Winter. [Note: This practicum may already be fully enrolled.]

Here is a [link](#) to other international law courses at SLS.

### Law, Science, and Technology

SLS offers many courses involving [law, science and technology](#), ranging from intellectual property to cybersecurity to regulating the internet.

### Leadership and Public Interest Practice

SLS graduates entering careers in P/SPS are likely to play leadership roles. Leadership courses can teach skills of vision setting, organizational management, interpersonal dynamics, and the mechanics of leading change in a variety of ways, including movement building.

- Diane Chin, [Public Interest Law and Practice \(7032\)](#). Winter
- Deborah Rhode, [Lawyers and Leadership \(7028\)](#). Spring.

## Markets and Corporate Governance

Businesses are a significant force in creating, perpetuating, and solving social problems. Businesses are facing increasing demands to respond to the needs of stakeholders in addition to their shareholders—employees, consumers, the communities they affect, and the planet. Understanding the possibilities and limits of business’s response to these demands is important for much P/SPS. Topics include the basics of corporate finance (e.g., efficient market hypothesis, modern portfolio theory); public finance; and changing concepts of corporate governance, including emerging practices of corporate social responsibility (CSR)); environmental, social, governance (ESG) factors; and impact investing.

- Paul Brest, [Corporate Purpose: Beyond Shareholder Value \(1068\)](#). Spring.
- Robert Daines / Curtis Milhaupt, [Global Business Law and Public Policy \(1063\)](#). Winter.
- Joseph Grundfest, [Securities Regulation: Capital Formation from Start-Up to IPO and Beyond \(1027\)](#). Winter.
- Colleen Honigsberg, [Corporate Governance \(1049\)](#). Spring.
- Jamie O’Connell, [Business, Social Responsibility, and Human Rights \(1047\)](#). Spring.

SLS offers many other business-related courses that include issues of public policy, including Robert Daines and Douglas Melamed, [International Business Transactions and Litigation \(5006\)](#). Winter; Alan Sykes, [International Investment Law \(5011\)](#). Spring; Alan Sykes, [International Trade Law \(5014\)](#). Spring; George Triantis, [Bankruptcy \(1003\)](#). Spring; Barbara van Schewick, [Antitrust \(1001\)](#), Spring; Alan Weiner, [International Law \(5013\)](#). Spring; James Yoon, [Technological, Economic and Business Forces Transforming the Private Practice of Law \(6005\)](#). Spring.

## Negotiation and Dispute Resolution

Whether engaged in policy making or social problem solving, SLS graduates are likely to need to seek agreement among multiple stakeholders—both allies and opponents—to their desired solutions. Most existing courses focus on adversarial interactions, but students must also learn how to work with diverse stakeholders in collaborative processes.

- Janet Martinez, [Negotiation on the Ground: Discussions at the Intersection of Theory and Practice \(7822\)](#). Spring.
- Janet Martinez, [Advanced Negotiation: Environmental Policy \(7824\)](#). Winter.

## Psychology of Decision Making and Social Influence

Virtually every policy and social solution depends on the behavior of various stakeholders, ranging from intended beneficiaries to those charged with implementing solutions. Complementing traditional decision science’s systematic approaches to rational decision making, these topics explore ways that intuitive decision makers deviate from rational decision making because of social influence and cognitive biases.

The topics encompass aspects of social psychology, the psychology of judgment and decision making (JDM), and behavioral economics.

- Rob MacCoun, [Carrots, Sticks, Norms, and Nudges: Changing Minds and Behaviors \(7501\)](#). Spring.

## Tax Policy

Current litigation involving the Affordable Care Act provides just one example of the role of taxation as a mechanism for achieving policy outcomes.

- Joseph Bankman, [Tax Policy \(1028\)](#). Winter

## Experiential components of regular courses, programs, and externships

Cutting across many of the preceding topics are courses and programs that have experiential components. The [clinics](#) involve interactions with actual clients, as do many [policy labs](#). Negotiation courses center around simulations. The social problem-solving courses involve ethnography. The [Three Strikes Project](#) offers an opportunity to study mass incarceration, criminal justice reform, and post-conviction litigation in real time. Participation as fellows in [Social X-Change impact labs](#) offer students opportunities to combine experiential learning with deep social science research. [Levin supervised externships](#) in non-profit agencies, government offices, and public policy organizations are intrinsically experiential. Quite a few externships have involved P/SPS as well as purely legal issues, and there are many possibilities for more. Internationally, SLS offers students exposure to comparative law and policy through the [Rule of Law Program](#) and the [W.A. Franke Global Law Program](#).

## Paracurricular Activities

Experiences beyond the classroom can build student interest in P/SPS and provide information or relationships that students can use to begin these careers.

SLS hosts the student-run [Stanford Law & Policy Review](#), which “informs public discourse by publishing articles that analyze the intersection of our legal system with local, state, and federal policy.” Various [centers](#) throughout the Law School host policy experts and events, including symposia, trainings and workshops, and informal lunch-hour discussions. [Student organizations](#) also prioritize a variety of policy areas.

The *ePluribus* Project is dedicated to promoting pluralism and the rule of law by cultivating the virtues of humility, curiosity, candor, empathy, courage, rigorous intellectual inquiry, and service in communities constituted by difference. Students and faculty involved in the project are dedicated to embodying these values in society, government, and the practice of law. Members convene once a quarter or more with supervising faculty to discuss paired readings, sometimes on alternative sides of a



specific issue, sometimes by authors whose identities and worldviews are fundamentally different. Emphasis is placed in initial sessions on readings by experts from a wide range of fields on the cognitive, active listening, and conflict resolution skills involved in navigating differences of identity, viewpoint, policy, and interest.

## Career Counseling, Placement, and Support

The Law School's John and Terry [Levin Center](#) for Public Service and Public Interest Law provides career advising for summer internships and post-graduation employment for students interested in P/SPS as well as public interest law.

Many SLS students and graduates seek employment opportunities at nonprofit organizations and government agencies that involve P/SPS. Still others have served as legislative or committee staff and/or as elected officials at local, state, and federal levels. The Levin Center provides individual counseling services to students and graduates who want traditional public interest positions, many of which include policy advocacy outside of traditional litigation.

The Levin Center funds summer internships as well as postgraduate public interest fellowships. Stanford Law Fellows can be funded to work with government agencies, including city attorney or county counsel offices.

As mentioned, the Levin Center also oversees the Law School's externship program, which provides academic credit for school term work with nonprofit organizations or governmental bodies. Each student enrolled in the externship program locally is required to take a companion seminar taught by Externship Director Mike Winn. In that seminar, students learn about theories of change, strategy screens, and review organizational budgets.

The School's [Loan Repayment Assistance Program \(LRAP\)](#) provides loan forgiveness for students working in law-related public interest positions for nonprofit and government agencies.

## Selected Courses Outside the Law School

Law students have many opportunities to develop P/SPS knowledge and skills beyond the Law School. The following list is by no means comprehensive. While many of these courses have been pre-approved by SLS Curriculum Committee, you may need to petition to take others.

The [Public Policy program](#) offers P/SPS co-term programs attractive to law students. Courses include:

- PUBLPOL 301A, [Microeconomics](#)
- PUBLPOL 303D, [Applied Econometrics](#)

- PUBLPOL 301B, [Economic Policy Analysis for Policymakers](#)
- PUBLPOL 306, [Writing and Rhetoric for Policy Audiences](#)
- PUBLPOL 308, [Political Analysis for Public Policymakers](#)
- PUBLPOL 353A, [Science and Technology Policy](#)
- PUBLPOL 302B, [Economic Analysis of Law](#)

Law students seeking to pursue social innovation courses at the GSB will find opportunities through the [Social Innovation curriculum](#) and [Corporations and Society Initiative](#), and may decide to pursue a joint MBA degree. Courses include:

- GSBGEN307, [Policy Time](#)
- GSBGEN 319, [Philanthropy and Impact Investing](#)
- STRATMGT 368, [Strategic Leadership of Nonprofit Organizations and Social Ventures](#)
- OB374, [Interpersonal Dynamics](#) (“Touchy-Feely”)
- OB377, [The Paths to Power](#)
- OB527, [The Art of Self Coaching](#)
- POLECON 230, [Strategy Beyond Markets](#)
- POLECON 680: [Foundations of Political Economy](#)

The Medical School offers courses on health policy, many of which can be found in this description of the [MS degree in Health Policy](#). The [Stanford Healthcare Consulting Group](#) (Med 279) is an experiential policy course that draws students from across the university. Winter and Spring.

Policy Courses at the School of Earth can be found in the [Emmett Interdisciplinary Program in Environment and Resources](#) (E-IPER) and the [Change Leadership for Sustainability Program](#).

Experiential policy courses at Stanford that are popular among law students and help ground students in basic concepts include:

- MS&E 297, [Hacking for Defense](#)
- CEE218X, Y, Z, [Future Bay Initiative](#)

Other departments of interest:

- The Psychology Department offers PSYCH 216, [Public Policy and Social Psychology](#).
- The Communications Department offers a track in [political communications](#) with a P/SPS orientation.

There are also extracurricular opportunities outside the law school, including:

- The [Haas Center for Public Service](#) offers [graduate fellowships](#) and coordinates [Cardinal Courses](#), a Stanford-wide clearinghouse of public service courses.
- The Stanford Science Policy Group workshop series (the Stanford chapter of the [National Science Policy Group](#)).
- The Stanford [Storytelling Project](#) sponsors courses and workshops oriented around P/SPS.

Beyond Stanford, SLS partners with the Harvard Kennedy School to offer a [joint JD/MPP](#).

## Faculty and Staff Advisors

The Law School stands ready to connect students with faculty and staff who can advise on courses and career paths. You should feel free to approach the faculty or staff member in your preferred policy area. You may also contact [Paul Brest](#) or [Luci Herman](#), Law & Policy Lab Program Director, who will put you in touch with someone with knowledge relevant to your particular interests.

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