Justice, Tech, and Innovation classes for Autumn 2021

Are you a student interested in public interest technology, user experience design, systems thinking, or legal tech?

There are 2 Stanford Law School classes offered in Autumn 2021 that are recruiting students from across campus to join project-based Policy Lab courses. Both of these classes focus on making the US justice system more accessible, fair, and equal.

1. **Unlocking Technology for Access to Justice, 808J:**

2. **Justice By Design: Eviction, 806Y:**

Read more about these classes, and generally how Policy Labs work at the law school -- including for non-law students. The courses are co-hosted by the Stanford Law and Policy Lab, the Stanford Legal Design Lab, and the Stanford Center on the Legal Profession.

**When are the classes offered?**
Policy Labs are unlike usual classes. They are often scheduled with a set time & date once students have signed up, and we can find a time that works with everyone’s schedule. Some Policy Labs meet every single week. Some meet formally for the first few weeks, and then have subsequent weeks set up informally around group work and office hour checkins. Each Policy Lab instructor team will be in touch after you’ve signed up, about what the schedule will be.

**Are these classes for non-law students?**
Yes! Both of these classes at the Law School are open to students from outside of SLS. In fact, we encourage students from other disciplines to apply. We’re hoping to make diverse, interdisciplinary teams to work together throughout this quarter -- and with the possibility of continuation.

**What kind of experience will the classes be?**
These classes are listed as law classes, but open to graduates & undergraduates from any field. They are taught as ‘Policy Lab’ classes.
- This means they are project-based, with teamwork and practical engagement with judicial leaders and stakeholders.
- There will be reading requirements-- especially during the first weeks to help you through the 'learning curve' of the challenge area. But most requirements will involve group work, engagement with partners and/or users, and creation of prototypes/presentations.
- Final deliverables are most often presentations, prototypes, or strategy memoranda, rather than essays or tests.
- The goal of each class is to create practical, impactful contributions to the public interest challenge your team is presented with.

Policy Lab: **Unlocking Technology to Promote Access to Justice**, 808J, David Engstrom, Mark Chandler, and Margaret Hagan

The U.S. legal system is in the grips of an access to justice crisis. In roughly three-quarters of filed civil cases, one side lacks a lawyer and so must navigate the legal system alone, as a self-represented litigant. Unnecessary complexity and lack of access to tools that aid efficiency also reduce the effectiveness and availability of legal aid lawyers. The resulting access crisis is most pronounced in eviction cases, consumer debt cases, and family law and domestic violence cases, where self-represented litigants often square off against opponents with lawyers, from landlords to credit card and debt collection companies to better-resourced spouses and partners. The COVID-19 pandemic has both drawn attention to this calamity in our legal system and generated real momentum among major institutions and stakeholders in thinking about how to solve it.

This policy lab will design and launch an ambitious, multi-jurisdictional effort to simplify and standardize filing systems so that scalable technology tools can be deployed to assist self-represented litigants and legal aid organizations in areas such as evictions, collections, and domestic violence. Led by former Cisco General Counsel Mark Chandler, Professor David Freeman Engstrom, Co-Director of the Center on the Legal Profession, and Margaret Hagan, Director of the Stanford Legal Design Lab and with support from the Ford Foundation, the Conference of Chief Justices, the National Center for State Courts, and the Legal Services Corporation, the project will work with key stakeholders in several states and tech companies to design a standardized and simplified filing system and data infrastructure. Done well, the project will serve as a proof of concept that our courts can be more open and effective by replacing the current thicket of variable filing and data systems with the kind of high-quality software applications that are ubiquitous in other areas, such as tax filings and mortgage applications.

Students enrolled in the policy lab will have a rich opportunity to work closely with the instructors as well as state chief justices and judges, state attorneys general, chief court administrators, and leading access-to-justice advocates. Working with these actors, students will map the legal, political, and technical dimensions of the problem and then design a pilot intervention among a select set of jurisdictions, culminating in a kick-off convening at Stanford of key stakeholders.
from each jurisdiction. Students will emerge from the policy lab with a broad and deep understanding of the US litigation filing system and the way that system has contributed to the access to justice crisis in the United States. Students will also have the option of continuing with the project during subsequent quarters—whether in a further policy lab, in independent research, as a research assistant, as a Center fellow, or otherwise—as the pilot intervention is implemented and evaluated.

Technical expertise is welcome but not needed, and we hope to draw students from a variety of disciplines, including undergraduates.

For more information on the policy lab and registration links, see [here](here).

**Policy Lab: Justice By Design: Eviction 806Y, Margaret Hagan & Nora al-Haider**

This will be the latest version of our ongoing Justice By Design: Eviction class, offered since 2019. The class focuses on creating, evaluating, and scaling new interventions to prevent eviction & mitigate the harms they do to families, health, and communities.

This quarter our partner will be the NAACP (as it was in Spring 2021 as well), and specifically its South Carolina branches. In the autumn, students will work on 2 particular issues that the NAACP is facing, as the organization works to prevent eviction with innovative, community-driven programs.

Earlier this year, the NAACP launched a new South Carolina (Richland County) pilot to have community navigators & pro bono services for people facing eviction. Our Spring class helped them create an outreach strategy, including a text message hotline, a website, social media posts, and data-informed community targeting. We also helped them with a scaling plan, to attract and train more legal navigators.

This autumn, teams will work on 2 more policy/innovation challenges:

1. **How can courts be more involved in mitigating the harms of eviction? And why are some courts reticent to do so?** Especially with COVID, there are many new pilots across the country to mitigate the harm of eviction lawsuits. Receptive, ‘first-mover’ courts have launched pilots to prevent eviction, using tech, holistic services, and court rules. But what about courts that are more ‘reticent’ than ‘receptive’ to new eviction prevention pilots? Why do some courts (including judges, court administrators, clerks, technologists, and others) not embrace these pilots? And what are strategies, insights, and best practices about encouraging more court involvement with eviction prevention and harm mitigation? Students in this challenge area will create a needs-finding analysis about what’s happening with reticent courts; a ‘promising practices’ deck that outlines concrete actions to engage courts; and a specific intervention proposal for the NAACP to use in South Carolina.
2. **Can we train large groups of community members to do ‘legal first aid’: spotting legal issues and referring people to services?** This idea emerged during Spring’s class. What if more people -- PTA members, church leaders, probation officers, locksmiths, people active on NextDoor, Reddit, and Facebook, or otherwise -- could be trained to spot their community members’ legal problems & then connect them with legal aid or rent assistance? The team working on this challenge area must identify what the legal restrictions are on training people who aren't lawyers to do legal issue-spotting; what the best practices there are, especially from outside the US, in doing community justice work; and what technology or design work could make it easier to recruit, train, and supervise community navigators. The team will create a proposal and strategy paper for the NAACP to use to determine if it can train community members in legal first aid, and then how to effectively do it at scale.


See more about eviction prevention pilots at: [https://evictioninnovation.org/](https://evictioninnovation.org/)

Read more about the NAACP South Carolina eviction prevention/navigator pilot at: [https://navigator.scnaacp.org/](https://navigator.scnaacp.org/)