

Course Information

Course Information

Space Law SPACE 9008

List of Prerequisites

SPACE 9001

SPACE 9002

SPACE 9003

Instructor Information

Valerie Oosterveld
Professor, Western Law

Course Syllabus, Schedule, Delivery Mode

Space-based technologies are central to the infrastructure of countries, and to the lives of individuals within those countries. Satellites are used extensively for telecommunications around the world, as well as for daily activities such as online banking, providing GPS coordinates, and tracking the weather. At the same time, space development is advancing at a fast pace – think of Space X’s proposed Mars colonization system, as well as proposals by organizations to mine asteroids for use on Earth – and the question arises as to whether the current iterations of outer space law are being outpaced by science.

This course introduces students to key aspects of outer space law. Outer space law is the body of international and domestic law applicable to, and governing, human space-related activities. The primary goals of outer space law are to ensure a responsible approach to the exploration and use of outer space for the benefit and in the interests of humankind. The primary international law documents governing outer space address issues such as the preservation of the space environment, liability for damages caused by space objects, the rescue of astronauts, the sharing of information about potential dangers in outer space, the use of space-related technologies, and international cooperation in space. These outer space treaties, coupled with United Nations declarations on spacefaring principles, were adopted in the 1960s-1990s.

This course will begin by introducing students to the core concepts found in relevant international and domestic law governing human activities in outer space. It will then consider six leading-edge topics: international law and satellite use; the militarization and weaponization of space; the problem of human-caused space debris and management of objects in space; asteroid and other mining in space; space commercialization; and space colonization. The course will end with a discussion of the future of outer space law.

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

- Demonstrate a fundamental understanding of key principles in international and domestic law governing outer space;
- Apply the legal principles governing outer space law to factual scenarios;
- Understand current gaps in outer space law as they relate to the topics covered in the course; and
- Critically appraise the main normative and practical challenges facing the international legal regulation of human spacefaring activities today.

The following topics will be covered in this course:

1. The core concepts of outer space law (Weeks 1-2);
2. International law and satellite use (for example, remote sensing, global navigation, and telecommunications satellites) (Weeks 3-4);
3. Militarization and weaponization of space (Week 5);
4. Space debris and management of objects in space (Week 6);
5. Mining of planets/asteroids (including property and mineral rights) (Weeks 7-8);
6. Space commercialization (Week 9); and
7. Space colonization and the future of outer space law (Week 10)

The course will be offered weekly in-person at the Faculty of Law with an option to participate via Zoom [exact day and time to be confirmed].