



# Oil and Gas Law Center Launched

NEWEST CENTER  
FOR EXCELLENCE

The oil and gas industry has always been a multifaceted legal and regulatory environment in which to operate. Rapid growth and change aptly describe the energy industry today. Recent discoveries of oil and shale gas, and the accompanying environmental scrutiny, have created an increased need for lawyers with experience in the energy sector. Law graduates interested in pursuing oil and gas law require a working knowledge of all aspects of the industry, to include the complex property and contract relationships created to develop the resource, and the equally complex mix of environmental and business regulations. Washburn Law's oil and gas program provides a targeted curriculum beneficial to students and to an industry seeking to hire well-qualified law graduates.

"During the past 20 years many law schools have abandoned oil and gas courses, often retiring the discipline with the professor who taught the course," said David Pierce, Norman R. Pozez Chair in Business and Transactional Law and Professor of Law. "To them, having an oil and gas program did not fit with their environmental programs. Oil and gas law was way too capitalist. Our program takes a positive approach to the subject matter because it's not necessarily pro-industry but it's certainly not anti-industry. We are training the future lawyers the industry will need to do business effectively. We are training the future lawyers governmental agencies will need to effectively regulate the industry."

The program that began with three core courses has expanded three-fold over the years, adjusting its curriculum to address topical environmental perspectives, emerging

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energy sources, and changing regulations. As a reflection of the law school's commitment to the program, it recently announced the establishment of the Oil and Gas Law Center to provide a structure for the existing oil and gas curricula. The Oil and Gas Law Center is the law school's fifth Center for Excellence. Pierce, who has been the driving force behind the oil and gas program at Washburn Law since its inception nearly a quarter of a century ago, is the Center's director, and says the Center structure will allow Washburn Law to more effectively attract students, obtain grants and other financial support for Center programs, and attract alumni and other oil and gas lawyers to assist with the Center's educational mission.

"Because of our program's solid history and our desire to truly meet the needs of a changing industry, we have one of the most extensive oil and gas law programs in the nation," Pierce says. He points to Washburn's use of full-time tenured professors who teach program-related courses



and the law school's judicious use of visiting practitioners who volunteer their time to share their knowledge with students.

Practicing oil and gas lawyers, many of whom are alumni while others are dedicated friends of Washburn Law, volunteer their time for the Mineral Title Examination course, topical symposiums, and other special events that provide Washburn Law students with additional training without additional costs. Oil and gas law, as an elective field of study, has always enjoyed a strong student following. Washburn has a rapidly growing group of alumni who practice oil and gas law.

"One of the major factors that will distinguish a Washburn Law grad from others is that they will have taken several classes specifically focusing on oil and gas," Pierce noted. "I've had employers tell me that's a huge plus, because not only does it validate that the student has an interest in the subject matter but the student also has a substantial amount of background in the area the minute they start working. It may take years for their competitors to gain the same level of knowledge," he said.

"Most students in the program end up with over 100 hours of CLE that we have provided to them beyond the classroom," Pierce estimates. "That sort of environment is really important, is really healthy, and it gives the students more connection with the alumni, the business community, the practicing bar, the judiciary—everybody," he added.

Going the extra mile—or 600 miles in Pierce's case—for students is not unusual at Washburn Law. Students taking the Mineral Title Examination course in 2012 attended the Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation's Mineral Title Examination special institute in Denver, at no charge to them, where they received invaluable experience, including the opportunity to network with legal professionals and potential future employers.

"We also make it possible for 1Ls to become actively involved in oil and gas law from the moment they arrive at Washburn," Pierce explains. "Through our oil and gas law lecture series, student travel programs, and unique curriculum, 1Ls can amass a fair amount of oil and gas law training by the time they seek out summer clerkships following their first year in law school. For example, just three months into law school I had several 1Ls who were learning about oil and gas law at the Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation's Horizontal Oil & Gas Development special institute."

According to the Kansas Independent Oil and Gas Association, the Kansas oil and gas industry ranks third in the nation for oil and gas exploration. This gives Washburn Law prime access to the industry, its leaders, and experts, many of whom routinely visit Washburn Law, mentoring students and providing hands-on practice.

"It's not uncommon to have lawyers working hand-in-hand with our students imparting knowledge and offering expertise," Pierce explained. He shared a favorite

story of a prospective student who was visiting the law campus with her parents on a Saturday when the Mineral Title Examination course was in session. Pierce says he had just broken everyone into small groups to work on a title problem when he noticed the trio walking through the hallway. When he stopped to introduce himself, the parents explained that their daughter had just been accepted to law school and they wanted to look around.

“Well I said, ‘I’ll show you around.’ Right over here is Justice Larson. He was on the Supreme Court of Kansas and he’s now on the Court of Appeals in senior status. He’s working with those students showing them how to do a title exam because that’s what he used to do before he became a Supreme Court justice,” Pierce recalled saying. He took them to observe the small break-out groups, each being assisted by practicing attorneys who are experts in oil and gas title examination. “I didn’t have to sell anything because it was merely what we do at Washburn Law.”

When presenting to industry groups, Pierce tells people to simply introduce him as a law professor and an oil and gas lawyer. He says “the rest of it is just fluff.” Proud of his association with oil and gas law, Pierce understands the importance of his work to his students, many who have gone on to successful careers in-house and working for leading law firms in the industry. Pierce says Washburn Law graduates can successfully compete for jobs in the oil and gas industry whether they are in Houston, Texas, or Billings, Montana.

“Folks compete from all over the United States to go to Montana, that’s a big deal. One of our recent graduates got his foot in the door to a large extent because he had taken a block of courses that demonstrated he was ready to go to work for them. They love him. And he thinks his career is unfolding in a dreamlike fashion.”

The Oil and Gas Law program includes distinctive course offerings designed to prepare students for the contemporary practice of oil and gas law:

- Oil and Gas Law
- Advanced Oil and Gas Law
- Mineral Title Examination
- Oil and Gas Conservation Law and Practice
- Oil and Gas Taxation
- Environmental Regulation of the Oil and Gas Industry
- Energy Regulation
- Drafting Contracts and Conveyances
- Externship in Oil and Gas Law
- Independent Study in Oil and Gas Law
- Directed Research in Oil and Gas Law
- New Oil and Gas Law Certificate

Students have the opportunity to earn an Oil and Gas Law Certificate after successfully completing a focused course that includes coursework, extracurricular study, professional experience, a writing requirement, and other general requirements.

