

# **Sustainability and Environmental Law in Costa Rica**

**Spring Semester 2026**

## **Course Syllabus**

**Professor Andrej Milic**

**In Class at F.I.U.**

### **Course Overview**

This course examines the intersection of environmental sustainability and legal frameworks within Costa Rica's unique ecological and regulatory context. Students will explore Costa Rica's pioneering environmental legislation, conservation strategies, and sustainable development practices while analyzing the legal mechanisms that support the country's reputation as a global leader in environmental protection.

### **Learning Objectives**

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

- Analyze Costa Rica's environmental legal framework and its evolution over time
- Evaluate the effectiveness of Costa Rican environmental policies in achieving sustainability goals
- Compare Costa Rica's environmental law approaches with international standards and practices
- Assess the role of legal institutions in environmental protection and natural resource management
- Critically examine the relationship between economic development and environmental conservation in Costa Rica
- Apply legal reasoning to contemporary environmental challenges facing Costa Rica

### **Assessment Structure (Total: 100 Points)**

- **Research Paper:** 25 points
- **Midterm Exam:** 25 points
- **Final Exam:** 25 points

- **Presentation:** 25 points

## **Module Structure and Topics**

### **Module 1: Foundations of Costa Rican Environmental Law**

#### **Learning Objectives:**

- Understand the historical development of environmental law in Costa Rica
- Identify key constitutional provisions related to environmental protection
- Analyze the institutional framework for environmental governance

#### **Lecture Topics:**

- Constitutional environmental rights
- Evolution of environmental legislation since the 1970s
- Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE) structure and functions
- National Environmental Technical Secretariat (SETENA) role

### **Module 2: Biodiversity Conservation and Protected Areas Law**

#### **Learning Objectives:**

- Examine the legal framework governing Costa Rica's protected areas system
- Evaluate biodiversity conservation strategies and their legal foundations
- Assess the effectiveness of national park and reserve legislation

#### **Lecture Topics:**

- National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) legal structure
- Wildlife Conservation Law and its amendments
- Marine protected areas and coastal zone management
- Indigenous territories and conservation law conflicts

### **Module 3: Forest Law and Timber Regulations**

#### **Learning Objectives:**

- Analyze Costa Rica's forest legislation and sustainable forestry practices
- Understand legal mechanisms for forest protection and restoration

- Evaluate payment for ecosystem services programs

**Lecture Topics:**

- Forest Law No. 7575 and its implementation
- National Forest Financing Fund (FONAFIFO)
- Payment for Environmental Services (PES) legal framework
- Illegal logging enforcement and penalties

**Module 4: Water Resources Law and Management**

**Learning Objectives:**

- Examine legal frameworks governing water resources in Costa Rica
- Analyze water quality protection and watershed management laws
- Understand water rights allocation and conflicts resolution

**Lecture Topics:**

- Water Law and National Water and Sewerage Service (AyA)
- Watershed protection legal mechanisms
- Water pollution control and enforcement
- Groundwater protection regulations

**Module 5: Climate Change Law and Carbon Markets**

**Learning Objectives:**

- Understand Costa Rica's climate change legal framework
- Analyze carbon neutrality goals and supporting legislation
- Evaluate renewable energy promotion laws

**Lecture Topics:**

- National Climate Change Strategy legal foundations
- Carbon tax implementation and legal challenges
- Renewable energy incentives and grid integration laws
- International climate commitments and domestic implementation

## **Module 6: Environmental Impact Assessment and Permitting**

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Analyze the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process in Costa Rica
- Understand permitting requirements for development projects
- Evaluate public participation mechanisms in environmental decision-making

### **Lecture Topics:**

- Environmental viability classifications
- Public consultation processes and legal obligations
- Appeals and administrative review mechanisms

## **Module 7: Environmental Enforcement and Sanctions**

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Examine enforcement mechanisms for environmental violations
- Analyze the role of environmental prosecutors and courts
- Understand administrative and criminal sanctions for environmental crimes

### **Lecture Topics:**

- Environmental Administrative Tribunal (TAA) procedures
- Criminal environmental law and prosecutorial strategies
- Civil liability for environmental damage
- Compliance monitoring and inspection powers

## **Module 8: International Environmental Law and Costa Rica**

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Analyze Costa Rica's participation in international environmental agreements
- Understand the relationship between international and domestic environmental law
- Evaluate transboundary environmental issues and legal responses

### **Lecture Topics:**

- Convention on Biological Diversity implementation

- CITES and wildlife trade regulations
- Paris Agreement compliance and reporting
- Regional environmental cooperation (Central American Integration System)

## **Module 9: Sustainable Tourism and Environmental Law**

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Examine the legal framework governing sustainable tourism in Costa Rica
- Analyze environmental regulations affecting the tourism industry
- Evaluate certification programs and their legal status

### **Lecture Topics:**

- Tourism sustainability regulations and zoning laws
- Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) legal framework
- Coastal development restrictions and tourism
- Community-based tourism legal models

## **Module 10: Emerging Environmental Challenges and Legal Responses**

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Identify contemporary environmental challenges facing Costa Rica
- Analyze proposed legal reforms and new legislation
- Evaluate the adaptability of Costa Rica's environmental law system

### **Lecture Topics:**

- Plastic pollution and waste management law reforms
- Mining restrictions and legal controversies
- Urban environmental challenges and legal responses
- Future directions in Costa Rican environmental law

## **Assignment Details**

### **Research Paper (25 points)**

Students will write a 8-10 page research paper analyzing a specific aspect of Costa Rican environmental law. Topics may include case studies of legal implementation, comparative analysis with other countries, or evaluation of policy effectiveness. Papers must include primary legal sources and scholarly analysis in MLA or APA format.

**Midterm Exam (25 points)**

Comprehensive examination covering Modules 1-5, including multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions focusing on legal principles, case analysis, and policy evaluation.

**Final Exam (25 points)**

Comprehensive examination covering Modules 6-10 with emphasis on synthesis and application of course concepts. Format includes case studies, legal analysis, and critical thinking questions.

**Presentation (25 points)**

Students will deliver a 15-minute presentation on a current environmental law issue in Costa Rica, including legal analysis, stakeholder perspectives, and proposed solutions. Presentations will be delivered during the final weeks of the course.

# **Advanced Topics in in Costa Rican Environmental Law**

**Summer Semester 2026**

## **Summer Course Syllabus**

**Professor Andrej Milic**

**In Class for Study Abroad in Costa Rica**

**May 16, 2026 to June 6, 2026**

## **Course Overview**

This intensive summer course builds upon the foundational knowledge of Costa Rican environmental law to explore advanced applications, contemporary challenges, and innovative legal solutions. Students will engage in practical legal analysis, field-based learning, and collaborative problem-solving while examining cutting-edge issues in environmental jurisprudence and policy implementation within Costa Rica's dynamic legal landscape.

**Prerequisite:** Completion of "Sustainability and Environmental Law in Costa Rica" or equivalent background knowledge.

## **Learning Objectives**

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

- Design and evaluate innovative legal mechanisms for emerging environmental challenges in Costa Rica
- Conduct advanced legal research using primary Costa Rican legal sources and international comparative materials
- Synthesize complex environmental law concepts to develop practical policy recommendations
- Facilitate stakeholder engagement processes in environmental decision-making contexts
- Apply interdisciplinary approaches to environmental law analysis, incorporating economic, social, and scientific perspectives

- Evaluate the effectiveness of legal institutions in addressing transboundary and global environmental issues

## **Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will demonstrate:

- Mastery of advanced environmental law research methodologies and legal reasoning
- Ability to design original legal frameworks and policy instruments for environmental protection
- Skills in collaborative analysis and presentation of complex environmental legal issues
- Understanding of the dynamic relationship between local environmental law and global environmental governance
- Capacity to engage diverse stakeholders in environmental law and policy discussions
- Proficiency in proposing actionable legal reforms based on evidence-based analysis
- Knowledge of emerging trends and future directions in Costa Rican environmental law

## **Assessment Structure (Total: 100 Points)**

- **Comprehensive Presentation:** 50 points
- **Final Exam:** 50 points

## **Module Structure and Topics**

### **Module 1: Environmental Justice and Community Rights in Costa Rica**

#### **Learning Objectives:**

- Analyze environmental justice issues within Costa Rican legal frameworks
- Evaluate the rights of indigenous and rural communities in environmental decision-making
- Assess legal mechanisms for addressing environmental inequities and procedural justice
- Examine community-based natural resource management legal models

**Lecture Topics:**

- Indigenous rights and territorial autonomy in environmental governance
- Environmental racism and legal remedies in Costa Rica
- Community forest management and legal empowerment
- Access to environmental information and public participation rights
- Environmental defenders and legal protection mechanisms
- Rural women's rights and environmental resource access
- Afro-Caribbean communities and coastal resource rights
- Legal frameworks for community-based conservation initiatives

**Intensive Seminar Focus:**

- Case study analysis of environmental conflicts involving marginalized communities
- Legal clinic simulation: representing community interests in environmental permitting processes
- Comparative analysis with environmental justice movements in Latin America

**Module 2: Corporate Environmental Responsibility and Green Business Law****Learning Objectives:**

- Examine legal frameworks governing corporate environmental accountability in Costa Rica
- Analyze green business incentives and regulatory compliance mechanisms
- Evaluate the role of corporate social responsibility in environmental protection
- Understand legal aspects of sustainable supply chain management and environmental certification

**Lecture Topics:**

- Corporate environmental liability and due diligence requirements
- Green tax incentives and environmental performance bonds
- Sustainable procurement law and government contracting
- Environmental management systems and legal compliance

- Corporate disclosure requirements for environmental impacts
- Circular economy legal frameworks and extended producer responsibility
- Green finance regulations and environmental risk assessment
- International corporate environmental accountability standards in Costa Rica

**Intensive Seminar Focus:**

- Mock corporate environmental audit and compliance assessment
- Development of corporate environmental management legal frameworks
- Analysis of landmark corporate environmental liability cases

**Module 3: Transboundary Environmental Governance and Regional Cooperation**

**Learning Objectives:**

- Analyze legal mechanisms for transboundary environmental management in Central America
- Evaluate Costa Rica's role in regional environmental governance initiatives
- Understand the legal challenges of managing shared natural resources
- Assess the effectiveness of international environmental cooperation agreements

**Lecture Topics:**

- Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD) legal framework
- Transboundary watershed management and legal coordination
- Migratory species protection and international cooperation
- Regional climate adaptation strategies and legal harmonization
- Cross-border environmental impact assessment procedures
- Maritime boundary disputes and marine resource management
- Regional environmental monitoring and data sharing agreements
- Trade and environment linkages in Central American integration

**Intensive Seminar Focus:**

- Simulation of international environmental negotiation processes

- Comparative analysis of transboundary environmental agreements
- Development of regional environmental cooperation protocols

## **Module 4: Innovation in Environmental Law: Technology, Rights of Nature, and Future Frameworks**

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Explore cutting-edge legal concepts in environmental protection and sustainability
- Analyze the potential for rights of nature frameworks in Costa Rican law
- Evaluate the legal implications of emerging technologies for environmental monitoring and enforcement
- Design innovative legal instruments for addressing future environmental challenges

### **Lecture Topics:**

- Rights of nature legal theory and implementation possibilities in Costa Rica
- Artificial intelligence and environmental law enforcement applications
- Blockchain technology for environmental monitoring and compliance
- Ecocide and international criminal environmental law developments
- Legal frameworks for carbon removal and geoengineering technologies
- Environmental personhood for ecosystems and legal standing issues
- Intergenerational equity and future generations' environmental rights
- Environmental law in the context of space activities and extraterrestrial resources

### **Intensive Seminar Focus:**

- Legislative drafting workshop: designing rights of nature constitutional amendments
- Technology assessment for environmental law applications
- Future scenarios planning for Costa Rican environmental law evolution

### **Assignment Details**

#### **Comprehensive Presentation (50 points)**

Students will work in teams of 3-4 to develop and deliver a 30-minute presentation addressing a contemporary environmental law challenge in Costa Rica. The presentation must include:

- **Legal Analysis Component (15 points):** Thorough examination of existing legal frameworks and identification of gaps or conflicts
- **Stakeholder Assessment (10 points):** Analysis of affected parties, their interests, and engagement strategies
- **Policy Recommendations (15 points):** Evidence-based proposals for legal reforms or new policy instruments
- **Implementation Strategy (10 points):** Realistic plan for achieving recommended changes, including political feasibility and timeline

Presentations will be delivered to a panel including course instructor, legal practitioners, and policy experts. Teams will also respond to questions and facilitate discussion with the audience.

### **Final Exam (50 points)**

The comprehensive final examination will assess students' mastery of advanced environmental law concepts and their ability to apply knowledge to novel situations. The exam format includes:

- **Case Analysis Section (20 points):** Students will analyze complex, multi-faceted environmental law scenarios requiring integration of knowledge from all four modules
- **Legal Innovation Section (15 points):** Design of original legal instruments or frameworks to address specified environmental challenges
- **Comparative Analysis Section (15 points):** Evaluation of Costa Rican environmental law approaches in comparison with international best practices and emerging trends

The exam is designed to test not only knowledge retention but also critical thinking, legal reasoning, and creative problem-solving skills developed throughout the intensive summer program.

### **Course Structure and Methodology**

This intensive summer course employs a seminar-style format with emphasis on:

- **Interactive Workshops:** Hands-on legal drafting and policy development exercises
- **Guest Expert Sessions:** Presentations by practicing environmental lawyers, judges, government officials, and NGO representatives
- **Field Components:** Site visits to relevant institutions, courts, and environmental projects (where feasible)
- **Collaborative Learning:** Peer review processes and group problem-solving activities
- **Research Integration:** Students will conduct independent research to support their presentations and contribute to class discussions

### **Prerequisites and Preparation**

Students must have completed the foundational course "Sustainability and Environmental Law in Costa Rica" or demonstrate equivalent knowledge through prior academic work or professional experience. Pre-course readings will be assigned to ensure all students begin with common baseline knowledge of advanced environmental law concepts and current issues in Costa Rican environmental policy.