

LAW 1019

The Law of Public Utilities: Bringing Competition to Historically Monopolistic Industries

Formerly known as: Renewable Energy, Internet, Uber: Bringing Competition to Historically Monopolistic Industries

Course: LAWG 1019

Section: 05

Limit: 1

J.D. Seminar (cross-listed) **Credits:** 2-3

Description

Our major infrastructural industries—electricity, gas, telecommunications, transportation and water—were historically controlled by monopolies. Since the 1980s, efforts to introduce competition into these industries have met obstacles. Battles before legislative bodies, regulatory agencies and courts, at the state and federal levels, have produced a distinct body of law. That body of law—the law of introducing competition into historically monopolistic industries—is the subject of this course.

From the principles learned in the course, students have written papers on such diverse topics as renewable energy, internet, movie production, chicken slaughtering, student loans, pharmaceutical research, Uber, Flint's water crisis, utility corporate form, cloud storage, electric storage, and telemedicine at the VA. Some of these papers have made their way into professional journals or law journals.

Regardless of the industry or era, the regulation of infrastructural monopolies and their competitors has five common elements: its **mission** (to align business performance with the public interest); its **legal principles** (ranging from the state law on exclusive monopoly franchise to federal constitutional protection of shareholder investment); **policy flexibility** (accommodating multiple public purposes, from service reliability to environmental accountability to protection of vulnerable citizens); reliance on multiple **professional disciplines** (law, economics, finance, accounting, management, engineering and politics); and **formal administrative procedures**, such as adjudication and rulemaking.

Today, political challenges are causing policymakers to stretch regulation's core legal principles. Four examples of these challenges are: **climate change** (e.g., To what extent should we make utilities and their customers responsible for "greening" energy production and consumption?); **universal service** (e.g., Should we bring broadband to every home, and at whose cost?); **privacy** (How do regulators induce personal changes in energy consumption while protecting the related data from public exposure?); and **protection of our infrastructure from hackers, terrorists and natural catastrophes**.

Complicating these political challenges are two sources of constant tension: **ideology** (e.g., private vs. public ownership, government intervention vs. "free market"); and **state-federal relations** (e.g., Which aspects of utility service are "national," requiring uniformity; and which are "local," warranting state experimentation?).

This field has many jobs, as new issues emerge and as baby boomers retire. Lawyers play varied roles. They advise clients who are suppliers or customers of regulated services, represent parties before regulatory tribunals, advise those tribunals or their legislative overseers, and challenge or defend those tribunals on judicial review.

Note:

This seminar requires a paper. J.D. students must register for the 3 credit section of the seminar if they wish to write a paper fulfilling the Upperclass Legal Writing Requirement. The paper requirements of the 2 credit section will not fulfill the J.D. Upperclass Legal Writing Requirement.