GHENT UNIVERSITY

Course Specifications

Valid as from the academic year 2026-2027

Law of the Sea and Protection of Oceans (C002500)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 3.0 **Study time 90 h**

Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2026-2027

A (semester 1)	English	Gent	lecture
			seminar

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

Willaert, Klaas	RE22	lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027	**crdts**	**offering**
Master of Science in Marine and Lacustrine Science and Management	3	A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

Law of the sea, maritime zones, shipping activities, natural resources, marine environment, marine spatial planning

Position of the course

This course provides knowledge and understanding of the international legal regime dealing with the oceans and seas. Taking into account the spatial division in distinct maritime zones, it discusses the regulation regarding the various uses of the sea. Specific attention is paid to the rules and principles on the protection of the marine environment and its natural resources, the international organisations involved and the current state practice. During this course, students also learn to critically assess new developments in the law of the sea within its broader political and economic context, including sustainable development goal (SDG) 14.

Contents

The course includes a general introduction to international law, as well as an overview of the different functions of the oceans and seas. Following a brief discussion on the history of the law of the sea and the main developments, the determination of baselines and the different maritime zones (internal waters and ports, territorial sea, contiguous zone, EEZ, continental shelf, high seas, the Area) are covered, including an analysis of their legal status, delineation and delimitation, the rights of states and the jurisdiction within each of these. Different functions and activities are discussed and the course focuses in-depth on the exploitation of natural resources (fisheries, non-living resources, ...) and marine environmental protection, covering general principles and mechanisms of international environmental law (principle of prevention, precautionary approach, polluter pays principle, EIA, ...) and zooming in on specific sources (land-based pollution, dumping, vessel-source pollution, pollution from seabed activities), aspects (prevention, remediation, liability) and issues (marine casualties, operational discharges, ballast water treatment, harmful anti-fouling, greenhouse gases, ...). In the end, an interactive game regarding marine spatial planning, under guidance of experts, is played to apply the rules and principles of the law of the sea and marine governance in practice.

Initial competences

Having a general interest in the oceans and seas, as well as a willingness to develop a multidisciplinary and critical attitude

Final competences

1 Having knowledge of marine governance mechanisms and international legal rules regulating the various uses of the oceans and seas
2 Understanding the legal system of the law of the sea, how this works within the international community and which governmental organisations are involved
3 Critically assessing international marine governance from a multidisciplinary perspective
4 Evaluating actual cases at sea within the framework of the law of the sea

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Seminar, Lecture

Extra information on the teaching methods

- Lecture: during the courses, students are stimulated to ask questions and to participate actively.
- Seminar: students apply what they have learned during the lectures (different maritime zones, rights and duties of states, exploitation of natural resources, marine environmental protection, ...) by developing a marine spatial plan within the context of an interactive board game.

No lecture recordings or livestreams are provided within this course.

Study material

Type: Slides

Name: Slides Law of the Sea and Marine Policy
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Language : English
Number of Slides : 247
Available on Ufora : Yes
Additional information: The slides contain the study material and serve as syllabus

Type: Reader

Name: UN Convention on the Law of the Sea
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Language : English
Available on Ufora : Yes
Additional information: A printed version of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (provided through Ufora) may be used during the exam

References

- Tanaka, Y., *The International Law of the Sea*, Cambridge University Press, 2023, 650 p.
- Rothwell, D.R., Oude Elferink, A.G., Scott, K.N. & Stephens, T. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Law of the Sea*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 850 p.
- Attard, J.D. (ed.), *The IMLI Manual on International Maritime Law - Vol. I. The Law of the Sea*, Oxford University Press, 2014, 723 p.
- Churchill, R., Lowe, V. & Sander, A. (eds.), *The Law of the Sea*, Manchester University Press, 2022, 968 p.
- Ehler, C. N. & Douvere, F., *Marine Spatial Planning. A Step-by-Step Approach toward Ecosystem-based Management*, UNESCO, 2009, 99 p.
- Ehler, C. N., *A Guide to Evaluating Marine Spatial Plans*, UNESCO, 2014, 84 p.

Course content-related study coaching

- Students can contact the lecturer or assistant through e-mail if they have questions or require additional explanation.
- Information regarding the exam (including an explanation of the types of questions and a number of examples) is provided during class.

Assessment moments

end-of-term and continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Written assessment with open-ended questions

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Written assessment with open-ended questions

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Participation

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is not possible

Extra information on the examination methods

- Written exam based on a variety of open questions to assess knowledge and insight.
- Evaluation of the active participation of the student during the MSP game.

Calculation of the examination mark

- Written exam: 80%
- MSP game: 20%

Facilities for Working Students

In accordance with Education and Examination Code