

SPP Special Projects – Business & Sustainability Strategy

Course Syllabus

Contact Info

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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Info

Time: Monday 5-8pm

Location: Swann 325

Course Description/Objectives:

Regardless of your year or major, on Monday nights from 5-8 p.m.; and for approximately 6-9 additional hours each week, you will be asked to think and act like a corporate environmental sustainability manager or environmental consultant. The work output you will create this semester will be more like what you would be expected to create in the ‘real world’ than what you are typically asked to produce in an academic setting.

Much like the ‘real world,’ in this course you will be judged on your performance as an individual, your cooperation/collaboration with teams, and your communication skills as you demonstrate them in class. Furthermore, over the course of the semester you will have the opportunity to develop strong presenting skills, learning how to make a meaningful contribution to the field of sustainability. Also, like in the real world, there will be hard work and good fun!

This course will be taught in 6 parts, representing steps a company might take to establish an adequate sustainability program. Your overall goal as an individual and in teams will be to learn those steps as you evaluate selected companies and their efforts. Over the course of the semester your familiarity with these companies will increase, and you may even interact with them. You may also have the opportunity to network with environmental professionals from the area through outside/guest lectures. Listed Below are the 6 parts of the course.

Course Overview

Part I: Understanding the Business

- What type of business are you in?
- What are the environmental impacts?
- What is the geographic scope?
- What does the Company supply chain look like? What parts of the supply chain are not operated by the Company?

How does the business fit into ‘society’? What do they make/sell/do?

Part II: Vision, Aspirations, Goals and Targets

- What is a realistic environmental sustainability vision for the company?
- What is the company culture, and how might that impact the vision?
- What is the positioning for environment/sustainability within/outside the company?
What do they/you want to be when you grow up?

Part III: Organizing for Implementation

- Where does the organization report within the Company?
- Who leads the environmental organization? Is there a Chief Sustainability Officer?
- How big is the sustainability organization?
- How does it work across the business?
- What role does senior leadership/Board of Directors play?
- Who are the key internal stakeholders?

Part IV: Engaging outside the Company

- Who are the outside stakeholders?
- What's the regulatory environment?
- What unique interface does the company have with "society"? How do you/they engage outside stakeholders?
- Who are they? Partners? Activists? Supporters? Detractors?

Part V: Business Value for the Company

- What is the customer/consumer base? What is their interest? What do they care about?
- How does the company use "green" to sell more?

Part VI: Critical Analysis/Evaluation

- Where are the major gaps in programs/policies?
- What have they said are gaps?
- What have others said?
- What do you believe the company could improve moving forward? What are your additional recommendations for future efforts?

For each part or 'unit' of the course, generally speaking each week, we will have a lecture and class discussion on the assigned readings/talks. Periodically the discussions will be student-led, based on mini-assignments relevant to each unit.

By the end of the semester, you should:

- Develop an understanding of the layers of complexity in driving environmental progress within a company or corporate setting.
- Develop ideas on ways to make corporate environmental programs work more efficiently.
- Develop a point of view on what will be required to achieve success in the corporate world if you seek a career there.
- Use formal communication to contribute to the many current conversations in the field of sustainability.
- Use communication as a form of inquiry, invention, and reflection.

As advanced undergraduates and/or graduate students, participants in this class will be expected to engage actively in the development of the course as the semester unfolds. A high emphasis

will be placed on classroom participation. Students are expected to attend class and to participate constructively. Students should inform the instructor if it is necessary to miss a class. Students missing more than one class will find difficulty making an A grade for the course.

Required Texts

There is only one required text for this course with other readings throughout the semester accessible online or via course reserves. However, attached are other resources you may find valuable. These are all relatively easy reads but will give students great perspective on the role you can play as leaders in solving environmental problems today and in the future. An effort was made by the instructor to select texts that are easy reads and also affordable. I hope you will purchase these books, which will be a great reference for you in your careers – whether academic or corporate. Please reach out to the library if you are having difficulties locating any of the required readings.

Required:

- Esty, Dan and P.J. Simmons, Green to Gold Business Playbook: How to Implement Sustainability Practices for Bottom-Line Results in Every Business Function, Wiley and Sons, 2011.

Suggested:

- Winston, Andrew, The Big Pivot, Radically practical strategies for a hotter, scarcer and more open world, 2014.
- Lenox, Michael and Aaron Chatterji, Can Business Save the Earth? Innovating our Way to Sustainability, 2018.
- Hawken, Paul, Amory B. Lovins and L. Hunter Lovins, Natural Capitalism, Earthscan, 1999.
- McDonough, William and Michael Braungart, Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way we Make Things, North Point Press, New York, 2002.

Course Expectations and Grading

This course is heavily discussion based and thus a relatively high portion of the grade for this course will be in-class participation. It is imperative that all students are not only informed, but also able to effectively communicate their opinions. In order to ensure all students are prepared for in class discussions, there will also be weekly reading reflections assigned due noon before class.

In-class participation will be graded as follows:

- 1 (absent),
- 0 (present but silent),
- 1 (good comments),
- 2 (excellent comments).

Absences for guest lectures or student presentations will be highly scrutinized.

I may cold call at times to make sure everyone has a fair chance to participate or engage in discussion. From time to time, I will conduct quick, 5-10 minute quizzes to ensure you are keeping up with the readings. **Together, class discussion, reading summaries and periodic quizzes, and individual contribution to the group project will amount to 60% of each student's grade.**

The remaining 40% will rest on the completion of a group term project consisting of a document of approximately 25-40 pages, and a presentation (30-minute presentation, plus Q&A, for a total of 45 minutes). This final group project will test your communication abilities highlighting the writing and presenting skills you've gained throughout the semester. During the course of the semester, each group will evaluate a company as we walk through the 6 steps of developing a corporate environmental program. There will be mini-assignments for each step, together forming a "draft" of the final paper. Based on feedback from the instructor and other groups/students, each group will have the opportunity to turn these individual pieces into a final paper and presentation that will be presented in class, and to the company.

Course Schedule and Readings

NOTE: THIS IS DRAFT AS OF THE BEGINNING OF THE SEMESTER - WEEK-TO-WEEK ASSIGNMENTS IN CANVAS WILL TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER ANYTHING LISTED HERE

August 17

- In Class: PART ONE: UNDERSTANDING THE COMPANY
- Welcome, Introduction to "Green Business"
- Review Syllabus; come prepared to discuss background and interest in "Green Business"

August 24

- In Class: PART TWO: VISION, GOALS AND TARGETS
- Readings:
 - First 5 chapters of Green to Gold: How to Implement Sustainability Practices for Bottom-Line Results in Every Business Function
- TED Talk:
 - Ray Anderson: The Business logic of Sustainability

August 31 - week of independent study

- Readings:
 - A Roadmap for Natural Capitalism, Harvard Business Review, 1999.
 - "Why Shouldn't Corporations Be Socially Responsible," from Where the Law Ends: The Social Control of Corporate Behavior
- TED Talk:
 - Jason Clay: How Big Brands Can Save Biodiversity

September 7

- Readings:
 - Larry Fink's 2022 Letter to CEOs: The Power of Capitalism

- The Role of Corporations in Achieving Ecological Sustainability,” The Academy of Management Review
- TED Talk:
 - Ellen MacArthur: The surprising thing I learned sailing solo around the world
- Discussion Post:
 - How Sustainable of a world can we create without changing consumption habits?

September 14

- In Class: PART THREE: ORGANIZING FOR IMPLEMENTATION
- Readings:
 - Making sustainability pay: company examples of ESG incentives
 - Engaging Employees to Create a Sustainable Business
 - Rise of the Chief Green Officer
 - [Optional] Exit Interview - Bob Langert
- TED Talk:
 - John Doerr: Why the secret to success is setting the right goals

September 21 “Live from...” UNGA/Climate Week

- In Class: PART FOUR: ENGAGING OUTSIDE THE COMPANY
- Readings:
 - N/A
- TED Talk:
 - William McDonough: Cradle to cradle design

September 28

- In Class: PART FOUR: ENGAGING OUTSIDE THE COMPANY
- Readings:
 - What is sustainable marketing and how should you use it?
 - Chapter 23 of Green to Gold: How to Implement Sustainability Practices for Bottom-Line Results in Every Business Function
- TED Talk:
 - David Katz: The surprising solution to ocean plastic

October 5

- In Class: PART FIVE: BUSINESS VALUE FOR THE COMPANY
- Readings:
 - Rethinking the Role of Sustainability Reports
 - The rise (and rise) of sustainability-linked finance
- TED Talk:
 - Hans Rosling: The best stats you've ever seen
- Discussion Post:
 - Anti-ESG Investing movement. Why? Counter movements?

October 12

•In Class: PART SIX: CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

•Readings:

- Top 10 Performance Indicators for Sustainable Companies
- Porter, Michael, "Creating Shared Value,Links to an external site." Harvard Business Review, 2010.

•TED Talk:

- Steve Howard: Let's go all-in on selling sustainability

October 19

•Readings:

- The Comprehensive Business Case for Sustainability
- Achieving Corporate Sustainability Performance

•TED Talk:

- Kate Brandt: A World Without Waste

October 26

•In Class: Bring it All Together

•Readings:

- BlackRock's Approach to Carbon "*Managing the net-zero transition*"

•TED Talk:

- N/A

•Discussion Post:

- Describe the most current Sustainability Accounting standards in depth

November 2

•In Class: Workshop: Student Working Session

•Readings (videos this week, length of reading summary):

- Marcus Murtz - how supply chain transparency can save the planet
- Katharine Wilkinson - how empowering women and girls can help stop global warming
- Paul Hawken: Project Drawdown

•TED Talk:

- N/A

November 9 "Live from..." COP 29 Baku, Azerbaijan

November 16 Course summary/Semester review

November 23 Working session/group projects (in teams)

November 30

- In Class: Final Group Presentations

Note on course schedule:

The Instructor travels occasionally for business, so it may be necessary to make some minor adjustments to the course schedule. Where possible, we may advance a topic if needed to accommodate these adjustments. You will be given as much notice as possible as these changes arise. However, this should not impact due dates for assignments significantly (if at all), nor should it affect accessibility via email.

Course Policies:

While I appreciate technology and try to make productive use of it, this is not a course in how well you can parallel tasks on your Phone or laptop while participating in class discussions. I would ask that you put personal computers and handheld devices away before class.

You are expected to submit all assignments by noon of each class day or at the beginning of class if hard copy. **All reflections should be size 11 font and single spaced.** In case of a schedule conflict or any personal issues affecting your ability to hand in an assignment on time, it is your responsibility to contact me and arrange an extension. You must arrange the extension 48 hours before the assignment is due (24 hours in the case of reading summaries). Unexcused late assignments will be penalized at 1/3 of letter grade per day.

As noted above, attendance in this class is expected. Those students arriving on time and excited to engage will be rewarded. I prefer that you arrive on time, and habitual lateness will be penalized. But, if there is an occasional situation where the choice is between coming late or not coming at all, please come to class.